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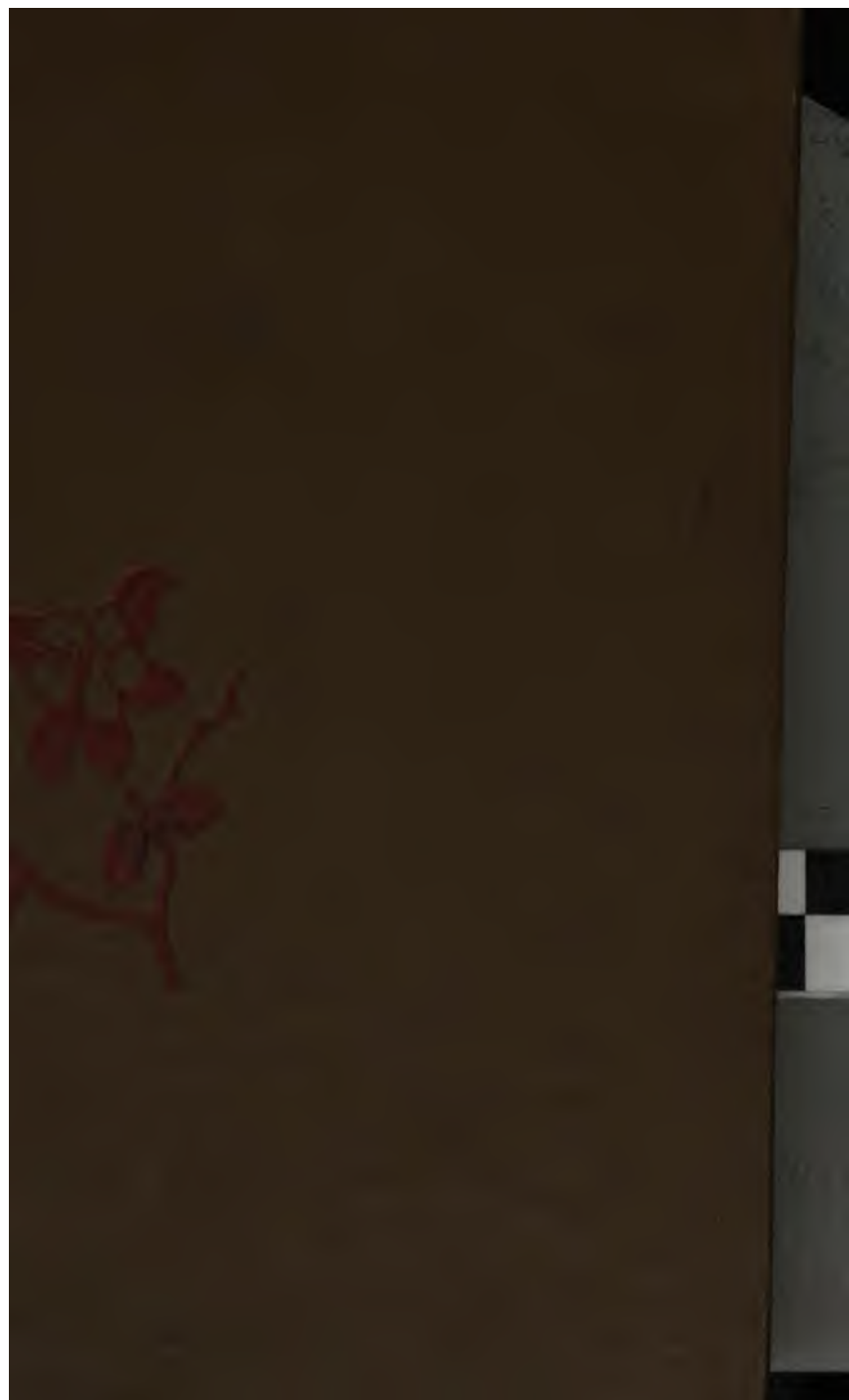
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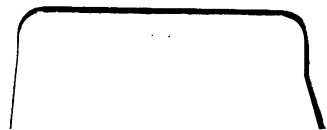


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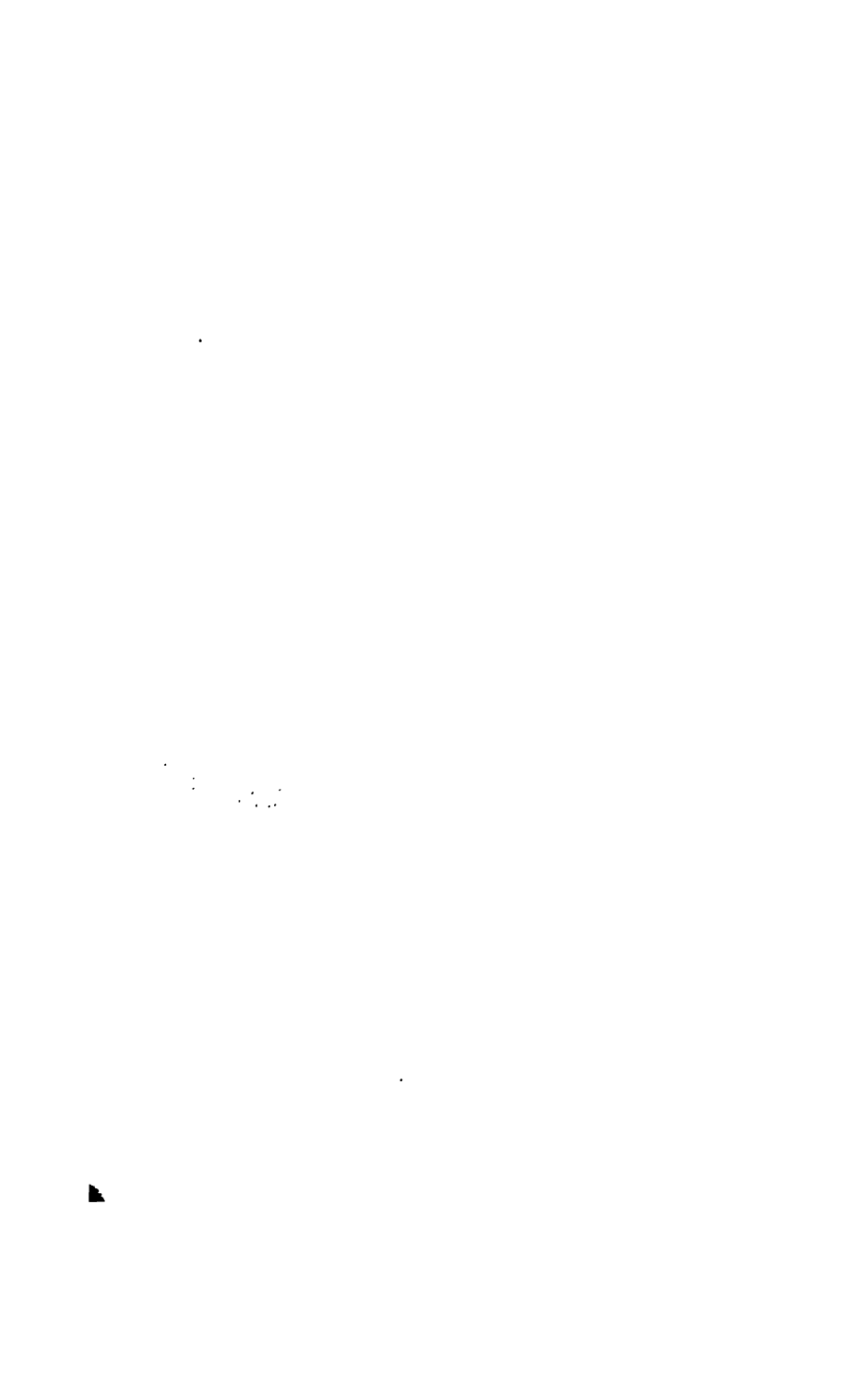
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CHRISTY CAREW.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'HON. MISS FERRARD,' 'HOGAN, M.P.,' 'FLITTERS, TATTERS,
AND THE COUNSELLOR,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:
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1880.

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‘ Es wäre zwei Königs Kinder,
Die hätten einander so lieb,
Sie könnten beisammen nie kommen,
Das Wasser war viel zu tief.’

HEINE.



CHRISTY CAREW.

CHAPTER I.

‘La belle manière de se faire aimer que de venir se planter devant une femme avec un lorgnon de la regarder des pieds à la tête comme une soupée dans un étalage, et de lui dire bien agréablement : Madame, je vous trouve charmante . . . il faut supposer à une femme une tête bien vide et un grand fonds de sottise pour se figurer qu’on la charme avec de pareils ingrédients.’—A. DE MUSSET.

MR. DAWSON grew tired of waiting for the appearance of Miss Carew. He had come to see her, and in order to make this fact patent

to all those concerned, he followed her into the back drawing-room.

‘How do you do, Miss Carew?’ he broke in upon her reverie, by announcing himself.

‘This is you—is it?’ thought Miss Carew, turning round in a deliberate manner, and holding out her hand with the air of a condescension. ‘Very well, thank you,’ she then said, aloud, and giving him the full benefit of her brown eyes, wide opened and with all the sympathetic expression she could throw into them.

This she did, with malice aforethought, to revenge herself for his having had the presumption to follow her into the back drawing-room.

‘Impertinent creature!’ she said to herself; ‘thinks I ought to feel honoured, I dare say.’

Mr. Dawson proposed to seat himself on

a settee near, evidently wanting to establish a *tête-à-tête* at once.

Christina pretended to shiver, and giving him a look of gentle surprise, led the way without a word into the front room.

As they entered, Mrs. Carew looked up. She had purposely directed the gentleman on his quest, as her step-daughter had surmised, and now she threw a questioning glance at that young lady's face, as if to ascertain in what spirit she had received this advance. Christy was inscrutable.

At the same moment Mrs. Rochford was announced, and close upon her heels came a Mrs. Cust and two Miss Custs. Christy rapidly introduced Mr. Dawson to the new-comers, and then, glad enough to throw on them the burthen of entertaining him, removed herself to a seat beside Mrs. Rochford. She was well-disposed to that

jolly lady, who, indeed, was always kind and friendly to her.

Miss Cust, a young lady who was fast approaching the blue age, took possession of him gladly enough, and before long Miss Carew had the satisfaction of beholding them deep in his pet theories, from which Miss Cust soon led him to the theme nearest her own heart—to wit, the Rights of Women.

Christy, while ostensibly taking her part in the conversation opposite, was holding a strange communion with herself. Thoughts came and went in her brain quick as shadows, but leaving, unlike shadows, a solid sediment of resolve behind.

‘I could marry that man, it seems,’ she said to herself, actually shaping her thought in words. It was the first time in her life that had occurred to her, and she actually blushed a little at her own audaciousness. She was eighteen, but some

girls at eighteen are still children, particularly convent schoolgirls, and Christina had never for an instant, seriously or jokingly, connected any one particular person with the subject of her settlement in life. She was well aware of the drawbacks of her own position, as she was by nature at once sensitive and high-spirited, she could not fail to appreciate them with a keenness that at times was overmastering.

Her confessor understood her, and let her alone, with the exception of now and again, when some unusually troubled fit was upon her, recommending his one alternative, the convent—a recommendation that quieted Christy as a threat sometimes quiets a naughty child. She took a different view of conventual life—it was an original one too ; for Esther O’Neil, Philomena Dunne, and other girls who had been in the same convent with her, and

had undergone the same experiences, had deduced quite different conclusions. Philomena Dunne's sister had returned thither and entered the order directly after leaving school, almost before she was eighteen. Christy's opinions were kept strictly to herself, if they were opinions, for they were scarcely anything so definite—vague floating impressions, nothing more.

‘I think it is very difficult to get a good servant of any sort’—Mrs. Cust was the speaker—‘but a nurse seems peculiarly ungetable.’

‘I don't know,’ said Mrs. Rochford. ‘Caroline, that Hannah of yours seems a very rough creature; Connaught, too, by her accent. How in the world did you think of engaging her? The children will be made so rough.’

‘She is fond of them, and then she is obliging, and I try to keep them with me as much as possible.’

‘Minna, yes,’ said Christy to herself.

‘I should so like to get a nice French *bonne* for them, if one could only afford it,’ sighed Caroline.

Christy heard her step-mother’s sigh. She was accustomed to hearing many such sighs evoked by the same cause.

‘Yes,’ she answered in her own thoughts, ‘if I were Mrs. Dawson you could afford it, no doubt ; and you wish it, too, my dear Caroline, but that little fact won’t bring it about. No, it won’t ; and yet—yet it is fifteen thousand a year. And he is ugly, sure enough, but I have seen lots of uglier men married, who had not one tithe of the money. And he is not a fool, either—and that’s a recommendation ; and he is educated, though, of course, nothing to—to——’

‘I met Mrs. Lawder Quin last week,’ continued Mrs. Carew, ‘and she tells me that her eldest boy, Charles Borromeo,

doesn't speak a word of English. Fancy that, at nine years old.'

'What objection has Mrs. Lawder Quin to the English language?' asked Mrs. Cust, drily.

Mrs. Rochford laughed outright.

'She would have no objection to *English*, Mrs. Cust. It is to preserve him from the contamination of Irish.'

'Poor woman! Caroline, I hope you will have more sense than to rush into such extremes of refinement as that. Charles what-do-you-call-him is a very ill-used child.'

Mrs. Carew gave her a look of offended dignity, and an old friend, a Lady Casson, entering just at that moment, she took the opportunity to change her place.

Mrs. Cust and Mrs. Rochford went on.

'You have sense, I know,' said Mrs. Rochford to Christy, 'so I don't mind saying what I think before you. I only wish

my poor sister there had as much in these matters—but perverts, you know, are always unreasonable.'

'Verts, Aunt Rochford, if you please.'

'Verts, dear—anything you like. This Mrs. Lawder Quin is one of what they call the better-class Roman Catholics here, and, according to what I see and hear, there is not an affectation upon earth they don't give themselves up to. There's a sample, you know. Fancy, an Irish child taught French before English !'

'Well, but Aunt Rochford, the idea may be that they wish him to acquire the accent while he is young.'

'Fiddlesticks ! It is affectation—wanting to be remarkable !'

'I know who *she* was, too. You know it yourself, Chris. That set are all alike—affected and ridiculous. To hear that Mrs. Lawder Quin—I met her once—and Mrs. Doran Byrne, women, one with a strong

Cork and the other with a low Dublin brogue, putting on what they are pleased to call English accents—ugh ! it is enough to make one ill !

‘What has the religion to do with it, though ? They *are* all you say ; they are ignorant, and they are pretentious and vulgar. It is not because of the religion.’

‘Certainly not, child. I did not mean that for one minute, but you know the two classes here go by two specific names, that include a great deal more than one would think.’

‘They do—they do, certainly,’ assented Mrs. Cust, but grudgingly, for she detested Rome and all pertaining thereto.

‘And,’ continued Mrs. Rochford, ‘there are Protestants, plenty of them, just as ignorant and unpleasant as the others, and indeed with less excuse ; and there are R.C.s—for example, like my brother-in-

law—whom no one could mistake for one moment.’

‘Yes, yes—decidedly,’ interrupted Mrs. Cust. ‘But then your papa, Miss Carew, my dear, is not only a man of family in the first place——’

‘That has nothing to do with it,’ Mrs. Rochford began again. ‘It is early education and training in every case, and thirty or forty years ago young people of R.C. families had a better chance than now. They were sent abroad to school—to France—or they were educated at home. And in those days there was still a pretty considerable remnant of a Roman Catholic aristocracy left. It has disappeared now.’

‘Yes,’ said Christina ; ‘and whose fault is it that it disappeared ? The Government that made the Penal Laws, and left the country in the state that produced the famine it did—the people should have been *taught better* than to live on potatoes.

And then the Encumbered Estates Act—look at Castle Carew—made into a sheep-walk. You may say what you like, Aunt Rochford, it's all the fault of the English.'

Her eyes were sparkling, and her cheeks reddened up. Mrs. Rochford glanced to Mrs. Cust, and both laughed at her warmth.

'You don't like English, eh, Chris?' she said, teasingly, and with a significant look.

'No, Aunt Rochford,' was the candid reply, to the look even more than to the question.

'Ah, Christy, you will change your mind. I assure you, Mrs. Cust, they make the very best sort of husbands!'

This was wise on Mrs. Rochford's part, for Mrs. Cust had been observing, not without pleasure, Mr. Dawson's apparently intimate conversation with her eldest daughter. Then it became necessary that

Mrs. Rochford should pay some attention to old Lady Casson, who showed symptoms of moving off, and there was a redistribution for a few moments.

She left directly. However, as the party seated themselves, Christy, with the air as if a sudden thought had flashed upon her, said to Mrs. Rochford :

‘ I want mamma to give a dance for us.’

‘ Utterly out of the question, Christina,’ said Mrs. Carew, in the most decided tone. ‘ I could not think of asking your papa for any such extravagance.’

She was more anxious than her step-daughter for the said dance, if the latter did but know it. Mrs. Rochford did, and shook her fat shoulders with an amused laugh.

‘ How much of a dance do you want, Chris ? As many or more than you have standing room for ; or will something under a hundred content you ?’

‘Oh dear yes! Jessie!’ she cried to the Miss Cust who was not engaged with Mr. Dawson, ‘help me out with this! Mrs. Rochford thinks——’

‘Stop, Chris. I don’t think anything of the kind. No, Miss Cust, I cannot bear that you should have your hopes raised by this madcap only to be disappointed again.’

Mrs. Rochford really was anxious to disclaim any responsibility in the matter.

‘What is it?’ cried Miss Jessie, pulling forward her chair. She had a pretty clear idea of what it was, but was very desirous of forcing a declaration or binding statement of some sort from her friend.

‘You know,’ was Christy’s reply.

‘Well, better you did not, Miss Cust. I fear nothing will come of it.’ Mrs. Rochford uttered these words in her full comfortable voice. ‘Indeed, I don’t like to hear such things talked of myself, old

as I am. And long ago, if any one held up a dance before my eyes and then cheated me, I don't know what I would not have been capable of.

Even now she would have been capable of a good deal. She was of a thoroughly gregarious temperament, and loved society dearly.

‘I think you would, indeed, Harriet,’ said her sister. ‘Mrs. Cust, did you ever hear how Mrs. Rochford was got to attend her first *levée* after Lord Quorn came here?’

‘Now, Caroline,’ expostulated Mrs. Rochford, ‘will you ever forget that old story?’

‘She sent Mr. Rochford a threatening letter. She wrote it, and drew a skull and crossbones, and a coffin-lid—sent it through the post to him, and frightened him nearly to death.’ Mrs. Carew laughed immoderately while relating this.

‘Oh! nothing of the kind — nothing. Now, Caroline, how can you?’ Mrs. Rochford’s remonstrances were but faintly heard through the laughter of her friends. When it had subsided a little: ‘Absurd, Caroline! You know we come to town every season. You really are too absurd.’ She tried to assume an injured tone.

‘I know. Yes; but was not that how it began?’

‘Threatening letters, then, are not always the dangerous missives one would imagine,’ said Mr. Dawson, who had been intensely amused, and considered himself greatly enlightened. ‘I dare say a great many of those we hear of are not substantially more real than Mrs. Rochford’s.’

‘Some, no doubt,’ answered Mrs. Rochford; ‘but some—most, indeed, of them are real enough so far as the ill-will goes. They are much rarer than they used to be.’

‘Yes; I am told so. I dare say the people are beginning to see the inconsistency of complaining of absenteeism, and at the same time frightening their landlords out of the country.’

Mr. Dawson laughed at his own saying, but he was the only person in the room who did so. Mrs. Carew had turned aside to Mrs. Cust, and was talking about a servant’s character with her. Christy was showing the younger girl some patterns of crewel-work, which had that day reached her from London. Miss Cust murmured something feebly appreciative concerning his last remark to Mr. Dawson; but she was even less at home in the relations between Irish landlords and the senders of threatening letters than she had been in the evolution theory, and Mr. Dawson, who had long been desirous of meeting an Irish landlord gladly welcoming Mrs. Rochford as the

wife of one, and consequently the next best thing, hastily left his seat and crossed the room to the chair beside that lady which Miss Carew had vacated.

Mrs. Rochford was surprised at his sudden advance, and, to tell the truth, for a moment or two the good-natured lady was a little suspicious.

The man was not a gentleman, certainly. She had been told all about him. He had been a *prétendant*, or had been considered one at least, of Miss O'Neil's, the lord mayor's daughter, and now—according to Caroline, who was imaginative—was Miss Carew's property. Enormously wealthy, which translated out of Irish into common-sense might mean comfortably off, worth while being civil to, as the times go, on account of that girl. These thoughts ran through Mrs. Rochford's head, as she graciously drew her dress to one side to make way,

quite unnecessarily, for the Englishman.

‘May I ask you?—you see, just now, with this new Land Act come into effect, and—er—all this agitation, do you find there are any great and beneficial changes in the relations of landlord and tenant? I am so deeply interested in Irish affairs.’

‘I wonder if this idiot is writing a book?’ thought the lady to herself. Then she said aloud: ‘Changes for the better, do you mean? No, indeed! Year after year it is harder to get the rents out of them. They have always the same story—wet or dry—and now it’s American meat. I don’t believe they ever are out of arrears, and I know they have money, every one of them. Look at the prices they have all been getting for stock—and the way they live. They don’t spend their money at all—never did spend it.’

‘Ah! I see; of course, they must have

benefited largely by the high prices of late years. But in turn they pay dearer for their own articles of consumption, and consume more.'

'No such thing. You would be astonished, I assure you, how abstemiously the people live. They are great hoarders—all of them. All pretending to be poor, and maintaining a poor appearance. Oh ! they are simply terrible to deal with.'

Thinking of last Michaelmas, she said this with genuine bitterness.

Mr. Dawson observed the ring of personal feeling in her talk, and asked, suspiciously :

'Why they found that curious practice profitable ; surely,' he added, 'they must find it of some gain ? They are notoriously a quick-witted race, you know.'

'They are all ready-tongued, I know, if that is being quick-witted,' she replied, with a little warmth of tone. 'I should

like you to hear some of the fellows on Gale Days. But as to the use of keeping up a pretence of poverty, making a poor mouth, as they call it, it is not any use; but they have got into the habit of doing it, and you never met anything so Conservative as they are in their ways. They detest change and innovation of all kinds. According to them, nothing that's new can be true.'

'But they are growing out of all that fast, are they not?'

'Indeed, I don't see it. Of course there is some improvement, but nothing to speak of. I remember, once, a very well-to-do farmer, a man who had given his sons professions, and from whom you would have expected something different, said something to me which I look upon as rather showing the feeling they have about these matters. He was complaining of the potatoes to me one day: I was looking at

a field of his. I told him the reason of their being so bad was his persisting in sowing the same seed, and that, too, of a worn-out kind, year after year.

““But, ma’am,” he said, “every one sows those same white rocks.”

““But,” I urged, “you know them to be wet and unprofitable : you have proved that, and why go on doing so ?”

““Because they were always sown, ma’am ; and, depend upon it, there’s some good reason or another for doing it, or people wouldn’t persevere on them.”

““You have no idea, plainly,” I said to him, “what that reason may be. I think I could help you to it : it is that the people don’t know any better.”’

‘Ha ! No doubt of it,’ assented Mr. Dawson, very sagely. ‘But do you find them at all amenable to teaching ?’

‘Teaching !’ she repeated, opening her grey eyes wide with astonishment. ‘Do

you imagine they would allow us to have anything to do with teaching them? No; there their priests stop the way. We should never dream of meddling with them.'

'I don't mean teaching in that way. Of course, they would naturally distrust your efforts to enlighten them. I mean as to making them more civilised in their domestic habits, and so on.'

'Ah!' replied Mrs. Rochford, shrugging her shoulders. 'It all hangs together. Anything coming from us is discredited. If we Protestants are better off, and more civilised than they, we are so by special dispensation of Providence; because, according to these wretches, we are to be nowhere and nothing, or something much worse, in the next world. It's all these priests.'

Mr. Dawson was startled.

'But,' he said, 'I like the priests im-

mensely—they are such thoroughly good fellows, all of them I ever met. I have met Irish priests on the Continent who were capital company—jolly good fellows !’

‘Yes—oh, yes ! indeed, I know that. But all the same you can’t trust them one bit. It was they who raised that odious agitation—never stopped till they pulled down our Church. What good did that do them ? And the extraordinary thing is, the Roman Catholics did not want it at all. It was all the doings of their priests.’

Mrs. Rochford had gone on talking out of a full heart, without observing in the least that she was by no means carrying her audience with her. Mr. Dawson’s sympathies were entirely with the advanced Radical school, of which he was himself a fair average disciple. Ignorant and bigoted, and utterly unable to grasp aught but the narrowest possible concep-

tion of a political theory; blind to all considerations of social or economic expediency, and unwilling, through partisan selfishness, to grant even a fair hearing to those who urged conflicting claims—that school is more infallible than all the popes together, and more ignorant of human nature than the meanest monk that ever wore a gabardine.

‘I can’t say,’ he returned, with a smile of easy superiority, ‘that I am at one with you there. I highly approved of that measure, and, indeed, I hope the day is not far off when we shall see the Church of England also disestablished. It was a monstrous injustice that the Irish Roman Catholics should be taxed to support a Church that was alien to them in every possible way.’

Mrs. Rochford turned round with an expression of disgust and vexation on her face.

‘Will you allow me to ask you if you

do not see that your own argument is, to say the least of it, inconsistent? Why are the people of Ireland taxed to maintain an alien sovereign? If this Home Rule means anything at all, it surely proclaims the real grievance and monstrous injustice—I quote your own words—of that. And also, let me ask you, was it not the landlords who paid for the support of the Irish Church, not the people, who we are *told* found it such a burden?’

‘But the landlords, of course, took it from the tenants in the shape of a higher rent.’

‘Of course the burden was thrown on the landlords, but I can tell you not a single rent has been abated—no—not all through the country; nor—and that fact ought to show you how grievous this much-talked-of oppression of the peasants was in reality—do I remember a single claim for reduction of rent being made in consequence of

the abolition of the Establishment. We are landlords, and ought to know.'

She stopped speaking, feeling vexed with herself for having said so much. The semi-sneering, semi-patronising expression of his face made her feel she had only spoken uselessly. What was the good of declaring one's self a partisan, to a fellow who was only a low Radical—perhaps an atheist, or something dreadful of that sort? She pulled her dress a little towards her, and leaned forward to speak to her sister.

Mr. Dawson, who had been about to say something that was at once amiable and superior, found himself constrained to turn to Christy. But at that moment some more people came in; the Custs left, and Mrs. Rochford, having seen who the newcomers were — Miss O'Neil and her mamma, and two gentlemen—stood up also to go. She did not care to know the O'Neils, and not having any particular

wish to attend the Mansion House festivities, saw no reason why she should remain and be civil to them. Nothing for nothing in this world—not even civility. She detested Roman Catholics, like the through-going Irish Evangelical she was. So she rose, and shaking out her voluminous silk dress, took her leave. Mr. Dawson opened the door of the drawing-room for her, an attention which she acknowledged by a very slight nod.

Mrs. Carew was relieved when her sister had gone. She had all along been nervous lest the Custs and Mr. Dawson should go, and leave her alone with Mrs. Rochford, with whom, for many reasons, she wished to avoid a *tête-à-tête*. That lady, who was two years her senior, had never left off an elder sister's manner of giving advice—dictating, the younger chose to call it—which was just now particularly distasteful to Mrs. Carew. Besides, she had overheard

some snatches of the conversation with Mr. Dawson, and she was angry with her on that score as well. Not, indeed, that she cared much about it one way or the other, but it served as an excuse, an escape-valve for a feeling somewhat pent up. She welcomed Mrs. O'Neil with a cordiality to which that worshipful lady was quite unused from her, and for which she puzzled her brains vainly to discover the cause, kissed Esther, to her utter bewilderment, and was altogether most gracious towards them. In all this she was only reasserting herself against Mrs. Rochford, and she felt a double satisfaction in thus championing her religion and her own independence at the same time.

Esther flushed up between surprise and pleasure, and looked at Christy to see if she too were not pleased. She, however, only arched her eye-brows, and signed to her friend to come over to her quarter of the

room. She was tired of Mr. Dawson, and wanted Esther to share the burthen of his conversation.

‘When did you arrive, Mr. Dawson? We were sorry to be out yesterday, when you called at the Mansion House,’ Esther said, when she had shaken hands with the traveller.

‘I was sorry, indeed, to miss the pleasure of seeing you, Miss O’Neil.’

He had quite recovered the little lapse into common-sense and naturalness that Mrs. Rochford had provoked, and was once more manneristic and affected. Christina noted the least possible change come over his face, and a slightly-altered inflection of his voice, when he perceived Esther’s entry. One glance from her and her frank, pleasant greeting reassured him, however. She knew nothing of what had occurred, namely, that her father had rejected him as a suitor for her hand. Miss Carew

knew it perfectly. Her informant was Lanty, who had got the whole thing directly from Esther's brother, Nicholas O'Neil, in his turn an unimpeachable authority; for he and the Mansion House chaplain, a frank gossip, were great cronies.

'Solely on religious grounds—on none other; for I esteem it an honour.' Christina was repeating Hugh O'Neil's speech to herself. 'And now it's my turn,' she added, lying back in a little soft chair and screening the cheek that was next the fire with a feather fan. She watched them both with interest. Esther sat between herself and Mr. Dawson. Their figures seemed to throw hers into high relief. Her face was paler than usual, and the broad velvet rim of her Gainsborough hat formed a black framing that intensified the delicacy and fairness of her features. The firelight, which in the growing darkness of



this winter day made itself by degrees more perceptible, played in her eyes and lighted up the blonde tresses of hair that clustered under her hat.

Christy was all in shadow, and Mr. Dawson's suit of chocolate-brown caught nothing of the light, and made of itself a dull outlined shadow, the nature of which would have been difficult to ascertain, were it not for the point of departure furnished by his shining bald crown.

'You are very gay just now, Miss O'Neil?'

'Yes, yes; I suppose so. At all events, everything we do in that line is known.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Dawson; 'I saw your names at the viceregal dinner and ball last night.'

'Tell me who were there,' said Christy, with a sudden interest, dropping her sneer, and turning round on her chair a little. 'Anybody you liked better than yourself, Esther—eh?'

‘Christy—you—you——’

She did not finish the sentence, for a name pronounced by the servant just behind her made her turn her head with a start.

The flame of the fire died suddenly away, and the grey fog outside the balcony rails, the lower edges of which were hung with little clear drops of water, seemed to stream once more into the room.

Mr. Jocelyn’s eyes caught hers for an instant as he passed her chair on his way to Mrs. Carew. On seeing him Miss O’Neil seemed overcome with surprise ; she first grew pale, and then the colour rushed into her cheeks. She never heard Christy’s teasing reiteration of her question—nothing but Jocelyn’s voice sounded in her ears. He was saying something to her and to Mrs. O’Neil now. Esther looked at him without being conscious that she was doing so.

The blaze shot up again in the grate as

for he was a universal favourite. His father, who believed him talented, had wished him to go through Oxford, with a view to a diplomatic or political career later. But the army was the goal of the youth's desires, and when he left Harrow, instead of going on to Oxford, he had crammed with a tutor for the examination. He was not clever—only brilliant—and there was a certain undefinable, unreal intensity about him in all things, which, joined to a handsome face and very expressive eyes of that nondescript colour which goes by the name of Irish blue, impressed people wonderfully.

He had caught sight of Esther's mamma on the instant of entering the room ; for that matter, the great carriage at the door below might have warned him of the presence of the O'Neil family, and Mrs. Carew had the comfort of seeing his eyes, while actually advancing to take her outstretched

hand, wander all over the room until they rested, with a look of pleasure that was not to be mistaken, on Miss O'Neil's face.

All that did not prevent him squeezing Mrs. Carew's fingers till her rings hurt her, which he did for no earthly purpose but to keep her in good humour. He then forthwith left her and crossed over to Miss O'Neil. Christy's chair was vacant, and he at once seated himself. Mr. Dawson rose as Jocelyn sat down, much as if the latter in doing so had touched a spring that communicated with him.

'Going, Mr. Dawson, already?' Christy said to that gentleman, who with much formality, and very slowly, was moving as if to take his departure.

He had remained rather more than an hour, and she was thoroughly tired of him. However, Mr. Dawson had stayed so long purposely to exhibit his willingness to enjoy her society, a compliment of which

any well-regulated young lady would have shown herself sensible. That Miss Christina did not show herself as sensible as she ought to have done of the 'attention' was to be regretted, as evincing a levity of character and a wilfulness or indifference to her own best interests that she would doubtless live to regret. Still it might have been mere coquetry on her part. Mr. Dawson had little difficulty in making this admission to himself.

When Miss O'Neil arrived he delayed his departure in order to show Miss Carew, by his demeanour to her amiable young friend, that she had better not push her coquetry too far. His farewell to Miss O'Neil was also doubtless intended as a warning to the volatile Christy, for he held her fingers in his so long, and smiled over them with such an infinite and varied tenderness in his somewhat short-sighted eyes, that Christy had difficulty in restrain-

ing her laughter, and the new-comer, Mr. Jocelyn, who was waiting impatiently till Esther's hand was relinquished, glared at him with indignation and astonishment, not unmixed with contempt.

He sat down in Mr. Dawson's empty chair, and, addressing Christy, said in a tone of mingled hauteur and indifference :

‘ May I ask, who is the—er—gentleman who has just gone ?’

‘ His name is Dawson,’ Miss Carew answered simply.

‘ Dawson—er—Dawson,’ repeated Mr. Jocelyn, as if that were a new experience in the way of names.

Christy took a few steps towards the door with the parting guest, just an excuse to leave Esther and Mr. Jocelyn together and to facilitate a flirtation to displease her step-mother. She was delighted to get rid of him, and with intense relief watched the door shut on his parting bow.

Jocelyn was really charmed with Esther. She was exactly his style, for one thing, and she was besides so perfectly fresh and unsophisticated. He considered himself a man of immense experience and knowledge of *le beau sexe*, and she was undoubtedly a novelty in the way of civic young ladies. Her dress was always in good form, her accent was a rather pretty variety of the Dublin brogue, she was shy as a fawn, perfectly without self-consciousness, sweet and good, and altogether a little gem. He meant to be awfully good to her, to educate and form her tastes, give her books to read, tell her never to wear anything green, and altogether to bestow his attention in general upon her until he must return to London.

He did not of course actually limit himself in point of time.

‘What a charming profile !’ he thought to

himself; 'it reminds one of Carlo Dolce.' Then, and leaning forward, he said: 'Miss O'Neil, is it not extraordinary that we should meet here to-day? Last night I was so—so engaged, you know, with all those tiresome people. It seemed impossible.'

Esther looked up. She was almost startled at the fervent, one might say impassioned, tone in which he spoke. She met his eyes fixed upon hers with a look of adoration, which long practice had made the gentleman an adept at assuming, and which came now only too willingly at the call of what was for once a real feeling. Esther felt troubled and blushed, and found not one word to say in reply.

He put his hand in the breast pocket of his coat and brought forth something, holding it cleverly in the palm of his hand, so as to be well shielded from view. Stretching out his hand to her with a glance

which plainly said, 'Look !' he opened the closed fingers, and displayed a red camellia bud, crushed and blackened, but recognisable. Esther glanced shyly at it. She remembered its falling from her dress the night before. Before he had time to relate the history of this relic, Esther became aware of something pulling gently at her sleeve. She turned round suddenly. There was no one to be seen, but a voice spoke timidly from behind her chair :

'Sing a song for me, Esther, please.'

It was Elsie. She came slowly into view round the arm of the chair, behind which she had been hiding.

'What is that?' said Mr. Jocelyn, stretching out a hasty hand, before which Elsie promptly retreated. 'Oh ! and where is your sister—what's her name—the pretty one, I mean ?'

'Here,' said Minna, appearing with alacrity from the back drawing-room.

She gave her hand without the least hesitation, shaking back with a conscious air her fair hair, which had just been *créped* by her nurse, then went to her mamma to have her fresh white frock adjusted, and to hear what the visitors engaged with her might have to say of herself.

Mr. Jocelyn rose from his chair, and fished up Elsie with a sudden dive from behind Miss O'Neil's chair.

'Why have you not hair like your sister?' he asked, seating her on his knee. 'Yours is all short. Were you in prison, eh?'

Elsie's hair was short and straight, save that the ends turned up naturally in quaint little yellow twists, that her step-sister had named drake's tails.

The child would not answer, and Minna, returning to the society of the gentleman who had called her the pretty one, Elsie was put down and she hoisted up in her

stead. She talked freely enough, and so loudly that her step-sister told her not to chatter.

‘Sing me song, Esther, just a lickle one,’ whispered Elsie again.

This time Christy heard her, and re-echoed her request, speaking loud enough for her step-mother to hear.

‘Do, Miss O’Neil!’ She joined her entreaties to Christy’s, and very pressingly. ‘I know you sing so beautifully.’

She did know perfectly.

‘Yes,’ cried Minna, with affected impetuosity, ‘sing “Three Blind Mice.”’

‘One more word, and you go to bed forthwith,’ said Christy, in an energetic whisper. ‘Let us have “The Coulin,” Esther,’ she said aloud. ‘Shall I light the candles on the piano?’

‘No,’ replied Miss O’Neil, quietly; ‘if the curtain is drawn back, the firelight will be enough.’

The piano was in the back room, and the keyboard was turned so that the flame fell on it. The dark crimson curtain was pulled back. Elsie, unobserved, hid herself in its folds ; but Mr. Jocelyn, who left his chair for a sofa, from which he could command a view of the singer, could see the little girl's shy face, and marvelled much at the rapt expression that came over it the moment Esther began to play the accompaniment. But he ceased to wonder as soon as the song began, and presently forgot Elsie, and everything else beside, but the sweet—and sad as sweet—voice, that thrilled him, he told himself, as no singer had ever done before.

Even Minna was perfectly still. Mrs. O'Neil's rubicund face took a pensive look, and Mrs. Carew held perfectly immovable a screen of peacocks' feathers she had taken off the chimney-piece. Jocelyn leaned his arm on the back of the sofa, and covered

his eyes with his hands. Never in his life had he heard such pathos of tone, such a simple and unaffected expression of sadness. There was no posing, no affectation, and the words were all clearly sung. He followed them each one :

‘I will fly with my Coulin, and think the rough wind
Less rude than the foes we leave frowning behind.’

The transient burst of strength and resolve of these words died away in a melancholy minor cadence that was followed by the forecast of promised, but sadly uncertain, tenderness and safety.

‘I’ll gaze on thy gold hair, as graceful it wreathes,
And hang on thy soft harp as wildly it breathes,
Nor dread that the cold-hearted Saxon will tear
One chord from that harp, or one lock from that hair.’

The mingled exultation and terror of this last line might have been called dramatic, had the rendering not been at the same time so pure and perfectly natural

and unstudied. She scarcely moved her head, the blonde hair was kindled into gold by the uncertain light, and her eyes, which she had scarcely raised from the keyboard, looked dark and bright alternately as the shadows came and went.

The last soft modulation had died away before any one of the listeners spoke. Minna was the first to break the enchanted silence by a vociferous demand for more. Christy, beside whom Jocelyn was sitting, stooped down to quiet her, and on looking up found, to her surprise, that the young man had crossed the hearthrug with a long stride, and was taking leave of Mrs. Carew.

She dropped her feather-screen, flashing iridescent in the firelight, and exclaimed against his premature departure. But he could scarcely bear to hear their voices, even Esther's, as he said good-bye and took his leave as hurriedly as possible. To stay

longer would have been unbearable. Unbroken in his memory he seemed to hear the sweet, sad sound re-echoing in the silent staircase. He wanted to keep that shadow picture of her and her weird singing, and in the mist and mud of the streets as he rode back to the Castle the vision of that fair, pale face, set in its framing of blonde hair, seemed to float before his eyes. And yet, strange enough, the more he became enamoured of this recollection, the more he tried to summon up, feature by feature, the sweet face before his own, the more it seemed to elude him. His memory began to play him tricks, he thought. He could not even resolve the exact shade of her eyes and hair, and before he began to dress for dinner he had reached such a pitch of confusion, that he felt sure he should not recognise her if he met her in the street.



CHAPTER II.

‘Il y a chez elles une émulation de vertu et de réforme qui tient quelque chose de la jalousie.’—
LA BRUYÈRE.

THIS Friday morning was frosty and fine. A bright sun shone through the tawny reek overhead, and the streets were dry and crisp. The mud had stiffened into hard ruts, and the street-sweepings, liquid the day before, that had been collected beside the footways, to wait there till the March winds scattered them abroad in dust, were now firmly frozen and had curious stencilled patterns as of

twigs and frost-bit leaves on their surfaces.

It was half-past ten as Miss Carew closed the hall-door behind her, and stood for an instant on the steps while she buttoned her gloves. She had an unusual business-like expression about her, and she looked all round the square as she smelled the sharp morning air, frosty still, though the sun was shining and the white hoar had melted off the iron railings and the old branches of the lilacs and laburnums that hung over them were wet and glistening. Her quick eyes soon caught the figure of a neighbour—one Mr. Conroy, who had an appointment in the Four Courts, and was leisurely wending his way thither.

Another morning she would have had no objection whatever to his company as far as the bridge, but it was not her humour now, and she deliberately stood still until

she watched him turn the corner of Gardiner's Street, and then proceed straight down it. She took the other way and turned into Denmark Street. As she crossed, she cast a look up to the Jesuits' church where Mrs. Carew was attending the ten o'clock mass. There was not a soul about the porch, and the huge granite pillars glistened in the morning sunlight above a deserted peristyle. Even the old beggar women, who sell rosaries and medals and lend dirty prayer-books to such of the faithful as have forgotten their own, were away. No danger of Mrs. Carew coming out and catching her. So she trotted along, striking her thick solid winter boots hard against the flags and shrugging her shoulders now and again, for in the shadow of the tall old houses in Denmark Street the frost still held its sway. Once round the corner and into Rutland Square, it was a new atmosphere.

Even the dismal mansions there, with their dirty windows, looked bright in the cold glitter, and from the square, where a wooden circus shed was being built, came a sound of hammering, which echoed round about, and gave the deserted place an air as of life and stir. A late school-boy was hastening up the steps of the great house where Lord Bective once held state, as she passed.

Sackville Street she hurried through. From a narrow lane midway a number of people came forth. One of the half-hour masses in the cathedral was just over, and Christy did not want to be stopped by any acquaintances who might chance to be of the number. There was a tiny breeze, but sharp and cold, on Carlisle Bridge, and she hastened on, barely throwing a glance at the white, glistening expanse of water on either side of the bridge. The sea-gulls were swooping from one grey wall to

another, their white wings gleaming in the sunlight. Far down the river a dun-coloured sail showed in the distance where a fishing-boat was running out to sea with the tide, and from the docks the network of spars and masts rose out of a greyish-brown vapour.

At the crossing by the college she met Esther's father, Hugh O'Neil, who, in company with his secretary, was on his way to his place of business. He stopped and spoke a few words to her. He had his great gold chain of office on, and the cold seemed to make his face greyer and harder-looking than ever. Christy disliked and at the same time was afraid of him. She had heard her father call him a bigoted old fool, wishing that he had half his money in the same breath, and she knew him to be exemplary in the last degree in the practice of his religion. He went to seven o'clock mass every morning of his life, and recited

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the Rosary, a religious exercise that lasted fully twelve minutes, nightly with his family, servants, and all assembled. A most uncomfortable personage, she considered. All the same, she showed her little white teeth with a smile as agreeable and insincere as Mrs. Carew herself could have produced, and said 'Good-morning,' and asked him if it were not cold, with a very good imitation of her step-mother's most finished manners. He having duly replied, she inquired if Esther was at home.

'She is at mass, you know.' The tone seemed to Christy to say, 'Where you ought to be also.' 'But,' taking out his watch, 'you will find her at home, that is, in the Mansion House, by the time you reach it.'

She wished him good-bye, and fled immediately. She reached the great white house in time to see the family party filing

in at the hall-door. The procession ending with Philomena.

She gave her card, with a pencilled message on it, to a servant, and in a few minutes the door of the sitting-room, into which she had been shown, opened to admit Esther, whose usually placid face wore an expression of mild surprise. She kissed Christy.

‘Well,’ began that young lady, in an impetuous tone—her walk had by no means exhausted her energy—‘you are astonished to see me here at this hour—eh?’

‘N-no—no! Come nearer to the fire, will you?’

She seated herself, and fixed her quiet, calm eyes on Miss Carew’s face.

‘You see, Esther, the fact is, I have come about that plan of mine. Do you recollect? you spoke to me about it there before Christmas—the Sunday-school class at St. Giles’s.’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, now, I repent all my idleness and lukewarmness, and I mean to begin it straight off.’

‘Oh, you good child! but it doesn’t begin at this hour of the morning.’

‘No; I only thought that as I had made up my mind to do it, I would come and tell you straight off, before I had time to change it again.’

‘I shouldn’t imagine that there was any danger of that, Chris, you were always famous at school for keeping your word.’

‘I like to finish what I begin,’ said Christy; ‘but I do confess I hate beginnings, and I have put this off long enough. Tell me this much, have I to—to teach them catechism—give religious instruction?’

‘Not at all. Give them a reading or writing lesson: they are chiefly servants of the very poorest and lowest class, who want to improve themselves.’

‘Reading and writing *only*? If I had known that, I should have begun long ago.’

‘Why that?’

‘Oh, Esther! I can’t tell you; you know I never liked the catechism. I can’t help it; now, just keep yourself quiet. I am *not* religious: it was left out of me, and that’s no fault of mine.’

‘Christy! surely you are not thinking of turning?’

‘Turning! La, no! I never had such an idea in my life—never. I would die first.’

This was a very extravagant statement, meant only to embody Miss Carew’s dislike of the two hours’ long service and rigid observance of that Evangelical community which in Ireland represents the Protestant Church.

‘Ah! I was sure of it,’ said Esther; ‘but, indeed, I wonder at you, Christina; and Mrs. Carew is such a fervent example.’

‘I hated examples always,’ observed Christina, drily. ‘Did you not say we should go down to St. Giles’s, and tell Father Macklin?’

‘Yes; we can go down at one. He is sure to be there between one and two. I wonder,’ she added, after a pause, ‘how you will like it?’

‘That isn’t the question at all,’ said Miss Carew. ‘Will they like me?’

Esther thought in her own mind there could be no doubt about that, for she had an immense opinion of her friend’s talents. However, she seemed to remember something, and going to a work-basket she pulled out a queer-looking little garment of grey woollen stuff, and began to sew it.

‘What in the world is that?’ asked Christy, with a sudden lapse into her natural manner.

‘It’s a frock for a poor child,’ replied Esther, ‘and I wish it was done. The

little misery must want it this cold weather. Chris, do you know anybody who would do a bit of sewing like this. The Vincentians gave me five pounds the other day to buy clothes for the poor people who want them, but I can find no one who has time to sew them for me. I am not asking you, for I know you have not time.'

Christina made a grimace. She did, indeed, detest sewing, like all her countrywomen—for what inscrutable reason, who can tell? Her step-mother, however, did not share this national peculiarity, probably owing to her Protestant up-bringing, and not only did a fair share of needlework herself, but insisted on Miss Carew doing hers, too.

'I asked the Callan girls,' continued Esther, 'to help me to get up a society—a sewing society, like the Protestant Dorcas, you know—but I don't know how it is, no one has time; and what have they

to do ? Grace Callan certainly took home a piece of sewing—I hope I am not speaking uncharitably—I thought she was to do wonders for me ; and that was long before Christmas. The other day Mary Kate Callan told me she did not even know where it was.’

Christy burst out laughing.

‘ You might have known Graceless of old, I think. Just now she thinks it is the thing to read. Lanty met her in the library with an armful of novels. She was scolding the man for not giving her nicer books to read, and desired him to find her some stories not so stupid this time. Imagine leaving the choice of one’s books to him !’

‘ I wish she would help me to sew up the flannels I have upstairs,’ sighed Esther.

‘ You may give me one—small piece to do,’ Miss Carew said unwillingly.

‘ That is very good of you—with all you

have to do ; really it is. And anything you say you will do is always safe.'

Christy's conscience smote her a little when she thought of the hours spent dreaming in the wicker armchair in her bedroom window, and she mentally added another item to the sum of good resolutions that had become her daily companion of late, a sum total which remained nevertheless almost invariable, for as one nail drives out another nail, each newly added resolve caused a predecessor to drop off into oblivion. She got up and went over to the piano ; on the music-stand was a new song.

'Ah !' she said, turning over a leaf carelessly. 'I must not forget to congratulate you on your conquest. My dear, how you did sing yesterday afternoon—Mr. Jocelyn absolutely wept.'

'Oh, fie !'

'You don't believe it, eh ? It is positive fact. He put his hand over his face, but I

saw him quite clearly with tears in his eyes. Yes ; and he went off so suddenly, just on purpose. Esther, you are a witch ! And your other adorer, Mr. Dawson, too. La—la—lala,’ she sang, playing a few notes. ‘ I like the air of this thing.’

‘ That is nonsense ; you want to put him off your shoulders on to mine,’ Esther interrupted eagerly, and with the design of turning the conversation. ‘ It is not fair.’

‘ Ugh ! what a horror that man is !’ Miss Carew came back to her chair. ‘ I never met anybody I disliked more ; he has such ways of talking.’

‘ He is’ so learned,’ said Esther, simply, but with a sigh, as if some memory oppressed her.

‘ Papa likes him, and he is to dine with us some day next week, I’m told ; but I think he is just horrid. Don’t know which way I hate him most—when he is learned or when he is only trying to be

facetious. Yet it is worse to have to pay attention to him and try to laugh at his witticism. Oh dear, how he bores me !

‘ Ah ! but he is good-natured.’

‘ That’s just your sort,’ returned Miss Carew. ‘ Now I know in your soul of souls you hate him, but you won’t confess it, not even to yourself. You are like old Judy Callan—Grace’s aunt. That is, I mean, you remind me of her. Do you remember the day we were all abusing some girl, I forget whom. Judy contributed a fair share of stones to the cairn, and then to square matters with her conscience, ends up with saying to me, “ But oi assure ye, Miss Carew, she’s an excellent historian.” ’

The imitation was so perfect that Esther was obliged to laugh.

‘ You are always too severe—you are, indeed. You know very well she said that foolish thing with a good intention.

You had all been abusing some one, and she was bound in conscience to say something to her advantage, you know.'

Christy was speechless with laughter.

'Oh !' she cried at last, 'we won't discuss that question. It's no use. I always know beforehand what you will say. Let's go back to Mr. Jocelyn,' she continued, impishly.

'But,' said Esther, 'we were speaking of Mr. Dawson, not Mr. Jocelyn.'

'Well, I know ; but I thought we had settled his account. I said honestly what I thought of the gentleman, and you crown it all by declaring him to be good-natured. I have always and invariably noticed that when any one—man or woman—is said to be good-natured, it means that nothing else can be said of them ; and, moreover, it is never deserved—never—it expresses the absence of all good qualities.'

Esther opened her eyes.

‘You can always say something nice of a person.’

‘To be sure, if it pleases you, Esther ; and, by-the-bye, how insipid conversation would become if that rule obtained generally. You can tell me that Mr. Dawson is an excellent geologist, mineralogist, or anything else you like to call him, and just as truly.’

‘Christy, oh !’

‘Oh !’ mimicked Christy, ‘you know it’s true, and you know it’s nonsense to go on that way. When Judy Callan had established the fact that Agatha Kelly was an awful flirt, and had not been to confession for two years, did it mend matters to say that she was also a good grammarian—eh ? Esther, I insist upon your answering me.’

‘Well, you know, it is an obligation to say something to the advantage of a person whom you hear spoken against.’

‘Fiddlestick ! See, Esther, I will sew up that seam if you will let me have your thimble. Do !’

‘Yes, dear. I have another one ; so there, and I can go on with this. Mamma has driven out to the Industrial Schools. You and I can have lunch, and then go.’

‘I won’t have lunch. I half promised to be back in time for the children’s dinner. Do let’s go early.’

Esther prevailed, however, and it was half-past one before they set out. Crossing Grafton Street, they plunged before long into the labyrinth of dirty, tortuous streets that run behind Dublin Castle ; narrow and dirty to a degree, without, at the same time, a single particle of picturesqueness to redeem the squalor and neglect. From the windows, which were set almost level with the walls—*à fleur de tête*, as one might say—were hung lines and poles, from which depended ragged garments of very dubious

colouring and texture. Underfoot was a soft, greasy mud—the frost had long disappeared—so slippery that the girls had to be careful of their footing. From the open doors of the shops came evil odours of all sorts, and the public-houses, terribly frequent, were surrounded by the usual gangs of hangers-on. They were civil, however. Even a tipsy workman lurched off the footway to let the ladies pass, and a huge drayman stopped his horse and cart at a crossing and roared some complimentary remark concerning their appearance to a friend further back. Two small boys at the same time, who were amusing themselves on a door-step catching the sun's rays on fragments of broken looking-glass, did not hesitate to direct the little yellow will-o'-the-wisp-like reflection into the young ladies' eyes.

‘Look at the urchins,’ cried Christy, ‘casting reflections upon us!’

‘Look at them, indeed!’ continued Esther. ‘Did you ever see such clothes? Now, Chris, you really might make a little garment for some poor creatures like those.’

The arabs indeed were somewhat more than half-naked, and the fingers that held the fragments of looking-glass were blue and red with cold. Still they were gay and impudent, and one, on seeing the ladies’ eyes turned on him, held out a hand and demanded a copper. Christy, always ready enough, dipped into her pocket, but found nothing. Esther produced a threepenny-bit, on seeing which the other arab descended from his perch on the dilapidated door-step and advanced also.

‘Do you know what that is?’ said Esther, holding out the threepenny-bit.

‘Ay! well, miss.’

‘Thry wud I know one, ma’am,’ pleaded arab number two.

‘No, no,’ she said; ‘that is enough. Run away now.’

‘Souper ! Souper !’ he shouted at once, and then set off in pursuit of his companion, who was flying with his prize as if for his life.

‘There ! that’s for your generosity,’ observed Christy. ‘Had you given him a halfpenny your motives would never have been questioned.’

‘That seems to be my luck,’ said Esther, naïvely. ‘I bargained with a boy one day to carry a parcel home for threepence. He looked so hungry that I gave him an extra penny ; will you believe it, he looked at it, bit it, and finally rung it on a flag, as if he doubted its being good.’

‘Like them. When shall we get there ?’

‘This next corner,’ replied Esther. ‘Is it not an awful place ? Just look at the woman who is in that window above.’

A fearful countenance was indeed scowl-

ing at them from a window high up on the other side : red inflamed eyes glared out of a thicket of unkempt hair ; the fiery countenance was propped on the hands ; the brawny arms were bare to the elbows, which were planted on the window-sill—their owner was exchanging the compliments of the season with an opposite neighbour. From another window lower down came the half-stifled crying of a baby, and a loud voice in angry altercation. A cat, seated on the window-sill without, had her head turned away with a queer, long-suffering air, as if she wished herself farther off, but could not stir. Swarms of children were playing in the street, and with one accord left off their amusement to stare and wonder at the new comers. Their little ill-fed countenances looked pinched and cross.

‘ This is the house.’

Esther stopped at a huge old mansion,

something like all the others of the street, save that no poles with clothes decorated the windows, and that the panes of the same were something cleaner.

‘Fancy living here!’ murmured Christy, while they were waiting for the door to be opened.

The children had collected in a crowd by the railings to watch them in. She looked at them with impatience. Fancy living in such a place! Evil sights and smells and sounds surging up to the very windows. What sort of home could that be nearly opposite? A soldier’s red coat lighted up one murky window, and an awful-looking face, barely human, yet a woman’s, scowled at her down from the same room. People with cans and jugs, which they tried to conceal under their skirts or cloaks, were hurrying to the front door, and then the childrens’ faces had sharp unchildlike looks. Horrible!

At last the door was opened by a girl, a pupil-teacher from the school which was situated across the back-yard of this house. Her face brightened when she saw Miss O'Neil, and she curtsied and swung the door back wide.

'Yes, miss,' she said, not waiting for the question; 'he's in the school: but go upstairs, and I'll send him to you.'

The hall was empty of furniture, save for a long bench that lay by one wall. The boards were clean, and a strip of well-worn matting ran down the middle and up the staircase. Everything had a bare, naked, cold look—clean, however, for the paint even had been scrubbed off. On the first lobby there was a square of matting. Two doors gave entrance to a couple of large rooms—drawing-rooms once on a time, as the scroll-worked ceilings and handsome carved marble chimneypieces testified, but now the living-rooms of the

Reverend Ambrose Macklin, and with his imprimatur stamped all over them. There were folding-doors between the rooms, but these were open. Each apartment had a long dinner-table, covered with a cheap stuff cover, running down the middle; each had a horse-hair-covered sofa, with coloured wool antimacassars, and a dozen and a half of chairs covered with the same material were divided between both. The chimneypieces had each a pair of Bohemian glass vases, and a centre ornament of the same. In the back room, which, to judge by the attitude of a Windsor chair near the grate and the fact that there was a fire smouldering in it, was the one most used by its owner, there were spills in the centre-piece.

A large red mahogany bookcase filled all one side of this apartment, and rows of well-bound books showed behind the glass.

Engravings, evidently of religious subjects, were hung round the walls.

‘Where on earth is the fiddle?’ wondered Christy to herself, and presently her eyes, which indeed missed very little, discovered the case beneath the horse-hair sofa. There was nothing more to see, and she yawned, and had barely time to conclude her yawn when the door opened and Father Macklin stood before them.

‘Esther, asthore! I’m glad to see you; and you, Christy—Miss Carew, I ought to call you, you are such a stranger.’ He had known them both at school long enough before. ‘I am delighted to see you, children. What wind, may I ask, blew you down here?’

‘Christy is going to take my class in the Sunday-school. You know I told you I would try and find some one for it.’

‘Yes! yes! Ah! that will be a good work, Miss Carew. I assure you it is a

blessed work you are undertaking ; and indeed you have come forward at the very nick of time, if I may call it so, for I was about to declare we could have no more Sunday-school classes ; and you have little idea of what that would mean.'

'Eh ?' said Christy, suddenly.

His earnest face impressed her ; it was with no voice of impassioned, vehement enthusiasm that he spoke. There was nothing whatever of the neophyte zeal about him ; the tones were calm and equable, as of a man who talks of his daily avocation to which he has grown well accustomed, as having become a part of himself. He was not one of the kind to pour eau-de-Cologne on his handkerchief before visiting a national school, or seating himself in his cramped confessional.

'Ah ! it is the saving, or at least the keeping, of the half of them. Look at the lives these wretched girls have ! They are

mostly servants, you know ; half-fed, half-paid, half-kept altogether, by people who have no right at all to be keeping servants—ought to do their own work, but are too lazy and fine to do it. And if some one did not keep an eye to these girls and collect them now and again, how would it be with them ? I am obliged to you, Miss Carew—indeed I am. I need not tell you you will have your reward hereafter ; and it is a scandal to this city that the Catholic young ladies do not come forward and do like you, and do good.’

‘ I don’t do any good,’ she said hastily, and with a glimpse of latent defiance in her voice and eyes.

She stood up and walked across the room to an engraving which was hanging there. It was Leonardo da Vinci’s Last Supper, a queer old engraving, yellow with time, mounted on a square of clean cardboard, and in a bran-new shining gilt frame.

‘Ah!’ said Father Macklin, ‘I see you have an eye for a good drawing, Miss Carew. Fancy my picking that up in an old broker’s shop for half-a-crown! I did indeed, then; and there are a couple of queer old ones after Angelica Kauffman. I bought the pair for seven shillings. The framing did not cost me much more, so I can’t accuse myself of much extravagance. A man told me there the other day that Last Supper might be worth a hundred and fifty pounds—yes, indeed!—and it cost me what I tell you.’

‘Where did you get it?’ asked Esther, also going over to look at the engraving.

‘Where I tell you—in a broker’s shop. And look at that pair; they’re rare, I know. The fathers disputing over—— I don’t know what the subject is—and the Martyrdom of St. Basilicus, after Murillo I got them for half nothing.’

‘You have no photographs,’ said Christy,

who was looking closely at what she took to be one—a small engraving of Raphael's St. Cecilia.

‘No—not a photograph. Ah ! they fade, for one thing ; and I hate them, for another.’

She noted to herself that there was not a single image of any sort in the room. A huge reliquary standing on a shelf of the bookcase, in a space left between the books, was, if some of the engravings be excepted, the only religious emblem in the place.

‘We'll go and see the church, but you'll take a glass of wine ?’

In spite of their refusal the priest rang the bell ; wine was produced and poured out, but they would not touch it. Then he rose and led the way downstairs, out the back-door and through a large piece of ground which belonged to the chapel-house, but which he had given up to the children for a play-ground. A private side-door let them

into the church, an ugly barn-like structure, as most churches which were erected during the time that the penal laws were in force, when it was prudent to avoid all appearance of ecclesiastical purposes. For the same reason it was built far in from the thoroughfare. The walls were painted a pale pearl grey, and the centre altar and two side altars were of pure white stone. The images were white, not coloured. There were no artificial flowers on the altars ; vases, with evergreens and ferns, and a few pots of primulas and hyacinths. No coloured stencilled ornamentation, no flaring crimson-and-gold-clad saints.

‘Have I not improved it?’ said Father Macklin to Esther.

‘Yes ; indeed you have. How fresh and clean it all looks!’

‘Ah ! yes, that was my idea. Cleanliness above all things. I hate colour—detest it ! You remember what that was,

do you not ?' He pointed to the statue over the Virgin's altar. 'Red and blue, with gold stars, and all that sort of thing. To me that is altogether a wrong conception of the Virgin. I wanted to hold her up to them as what she really was, one of themselves ; and, above all, pure and spotless externally as well as internally, cleanly as well as virtuous. For that reason I have had these walls washed, as you see. They were all coloured too. I can't bear it. Simplicity and cleanliness first for me. After we have got that far, let us have art if you will. I wish with all my heart these people of mine could be taught the rudiments of cleanliness. Oh ! it's—it's——'

He did not say what it was, but finished his speech with an emphatic shake of the head. Christy took another look around the bleak, cold edifice, and the ugly square windows let in a flood of light that showed

all its cleanness and at the same time its bareness.

‘You don’t say that you like my altars, though,’ he said quickly to Christina.

She made haste to answer, ‘Yes, yes, it was excellent; in such good taste. The plainness in itself was laudable, even without the good motive.’

In reality she did not admire it, but thought fit to say so chiefly from that motive which it must be confessed was nearly always uppermost with her—the wish to please, or rather—to do her justice—to give pleasure. There is a difference, though ill-natured critics often fail to distinguish between them. Her tastes were different, and she thought the altar of the convent chapel, which was Carrara marble exquisitely carved in gothic design, with huge bronze candelabra and winter and summer superb wax-flowers of the very best kind, infinitely superior. To her the

rusty fern leaves and the primulas, half whose blossoms had tumbled off, were rather a sacrifice to his ideas, and the poor people surely could not understand why they should be preferable to the usual red and white sunflowers.

‘I dare say,’ she said to herself, ‘his sermons are just as far over their heads.’ She had little idea how mistaken she was.

Father Macklin had taken off his biretta as they stood by the foot of the altar, looking at it. There was a faint smell of incense and that peculiar odour that wax-candles always have, reminding one of a vestry, and mixed with this the evanescent perfumes of the primula. It was past three o’clock and the last rays of the winter sun fell with a feeble light on the highest window-panes and lit up the brass pipes of the organ, which was mounted up in the opposite wall.

Christy's spirits seemed to have deserted her altogether. The chillness and bleakness of the place affected her in some inexplicable way, she could not tell how, and she sighed deeply once or twice without any reason. Esther and Father Macklin were saying something in a low voice. Though they spoke in a sort of whisper, the words seemed to her to roll round and round the bare walls. They were talking of Philomena Dunne, who played the organ at twelve o'clock mass, in the afternoon for vespers, and also at the evening devotions.

'She is not strong enough. I think some one might play in the evening and allow her to stay at home.'

'Um !' said Father Macklin, 'it's not so easy to find a substitute.'

It was not unkindly said or meant. He was one of those who never spare themselves in any way, and persons of that temperament are seldom considerate for others.

‘But I’ll see, since you ask it, Esther. I may expect you there on Sunday, Miss Carew, so I can send out word—eh?—at a quarter to two?’

‘Yes,’ answered Christina, with a kind of gulp.

It was done now, and, at all events, it was only for a few months. The matter was decided, and the two girls left at once now. The dark was actually falling, though it was but four o’clock. The day seemed to have vanished suddenly.

They parted at the corner of a street. Esther was in a hurry to get back, and could not walk to the bridge as her companion begged.

‘I am in for it now,’ observed Christy. ‘The thing is, will it do any good?’

‘I thought that, too, until one day a poor servant girl told me that she had a letter she wanted so badly to answer, and she felt ashamed to ask any one to write

it for her ; that if I would only teach her. And, do you know, she was able to write pretty legibly by the end of the time. So after that I——’

‘ Ah ! yes, yes. Well, you shan’t hear me grumble any more. I must run, positively. Good-bye !’

The men were all hurrying home now from their work, and the bridge was crowded. The tide was at the ebb, and the mud-banks at both sides were bare and glistening. There were even more sea-gulls than in the morning, and they swooped from side to side, screaming hoarsely. A tawny fog rolled past the horizon where the sun had set ; far up the river curve, and below the bridge, a mist was creeping up from the sea and hiding the ships as it reached them one by one.

She turned out of the thoroughfare of Sackville Street, for Lanty might meet her there by herself, a thing not allowed at

home, and sped up a side street at such a pace that she was almost breathless when she reached her own hall door. Before she had time to knock, the door was thrown open to give exit to Mr. Jocelyn. He, running out in a hurry with his stick held up to signal a car which was passing at that moment, had reached the foot of the steps before he saw her.

‘Miss Carew,’ he cried, turning round suddenly ; then, as if startled : ‘I beg your pardon—I did not see you. How do you do ? Sorry to miss you. Good day.’

This was all said while shaking hands with her, he scarcely delayed an instant, he jumped on the car and was off. She, impatient and wondering, ran upstairs. On her way she almost ran against her stepmother, who was leaving the drawing-room to go and dress for dinner.

‘Caught !’ muttered Christy ; ‘now for it.’

To her surprise Mrs. Carew, who was humming an air, merely said in her most careless, good-humoured voice:

‘Been out, my dear? Cold, eh?’ and passed on, gathering up as she went the trailing skirt of her dress.

Christy fell back to let her get quite out of the way, and peeped into the drawing-room. No one there but Minna sprawling at her ease on the sheepskin before the fire.

‘You are there, are you?’ said her step-sister. ‘Get up and sit properly, miss. Look how you are spoiling your frock; and what is Elsie doing?’

‘She’s in punishment. She went and spilt the ink-bottle.’

From Minna’s voice and manner one would think she was rejoiced at her sister’s misfortune, but in reality she was not in the least so, for she was in the main a good-hearted child; whenever Elsie was whipped

she roared sympathetically. It was merely that she enjoyed scenes, having inherited her mother's excitable temperament, and life in the nursery was dull without an excitement of some sort now and then even when she had to pay in *propria persona* the penalty of evoking it.

Christy went upstairs and took off her walking-suit. The nursery was on the same landing as her room, and on her way downstairs she opened the door and cast a reconnoitring glance round. There was no light, the fire had burned down to the merest spark, and the nurse was away. Over by the window, the blind of which was not pulled down, stood Elsie's small person, just discernible in the gloom, the yellow head leant pensively against the shutter, and evidently lost in gloomy reflection.

Christy stood still for a moment looking at her, then she called softly :

‘Elsie!’

Elsie looked round, but did not move from her corner, and only drooped her head a little more, expecting another scolding, for it was Christina’s ink-bottle she had spilled.

‘Come along, then,’ said Christy, and lifting her in her arms she carried her downstairs.

Elsie was delighted, though as usual subdued. She said not a word, but Christy felt the little yellow head pressed closer to her neck as she carried her. Arrived in the drawing-room she drove off Minna, who had again ensconced herself in the sheepskin, and seated herself and Elsie in the comfortable blaze of the fire.

‘Sit on the rug, old lady, I’m tired,’ she said, lifting down Elsie from her lap.

Elsie was only too grateful for even that favour, and Christy lay back in her chair and gave herself up to that sensation of

rest and warmth and ease, so pleasurable after a long wintry walk.

The candles were not yet lighted, and the fitful bright light came and went on the gildings and the pictures. The crystals sparkled cheerfully, and the red draperies glowed ; and from Mrs. Carew's table, near at hand, came the perfume of her never-failing glass of flowers.

The fire ceased to flicker, and burned into a clear red mass. Christy thought she saw Father Ambrose Macklin's face in the coals.

'Poor Father Macklin ! his church—hideous barn that it was ; his school ; his all in all,' she said to herself, with a little shiver, pulling up, at the same time, a silk cushion, so that she could rest her cheek upon it. 'Even so, why not be a little more comfortable at home?' she mused, recalling the nine horse-hair chairs in a row, the sofa, the engravings—cold, grey

things, and the tiny, smouldering, black fire. Poor man ! After all it was perhaps to be considered, did he think himself so badly off as she did. A great deal of precious pity is wasted in this world. Who *was* Father Macklin ? Possibly this, to her, bare, bleak asceticism was luxury and elegance to him—quite possibly,’ reflected Christina sagely ; ‘but anyhow I hope the poor soul has a better fire now. Fancy him seated at such an hearth—all by himself, too.’

Could Christina have seen the same hearth, she would have found it bleaker and barer than ever, for the fire was out, and the master busy in a dirty lane, two miles away, exhorting a girl of seventeen, who had recently been turned out of her situation for drunkenness, and who had come home to an almost starving mother, at whose instance the priest had interfered.



CHAPTER III.

A WEEK elapsed before Esther and Christina met again, and the latter had had one trial of her benevolent undertaking. Notwithstanding her promise, she had been unable to relate her experience to her friend. It was prosaic enough.

‘Nothing remarkable,’ she said, in reply to a question from Esther on the occasion of that young lady’s calling one day to ask her to accompany her on a country walk. ‘They are all dirty, stupid and willing—

rather too willing, and that is an obstacle, particularly in the writing-lesson. Some of them are wretchedly dirty, but I am in hopes that the example of the one or two neat, nice girls will do the others good. Poor creatures ! Certainly it is sad to see grown girls in such a state of ignorance ; and these are but a sample of the mass. Father Macklin came in for a few minutes to introduce me and to see that all was in order, and then I went to work. Pooh ! it's pretty useless I think.'

'What did you do ? You must not be in too great a hurry, you know. I hope, Chris, you did not make them any speeches.'

'Speeches ! oh, Esther, you will kill me,' and Miss Carew threw herself back among the sofa-cushions, and laughed out long and loud. 'How came you ever to think of such a thing ? No. I taught them how to hold their pens, and I wrote

a letter for one girl—yes, really—to her brother in America. I am not joking, Esther. I did my best indeed.'

'I am sure you did,' said Esther ; then, in a graver tone, 'and the less you liked it, you know, the greater your reward will be.'

'Hum !' Christina was thoughtful for a moment, and then she turned the conversation. I say, Esther, do you like Mr. Dawson ?'

'Ah ! well, yes.'

'I knew you were going to say yes. You would think it against charity to say no. But I want to hear *do* you like him ?'

Esther only looked at her, opening her eyes a little wider than before.

Christy laughed a short uneasy laugh.

'Would you marry him ?'

Esther jumped to the other end of the sofa.

'Oh !' she cried ; 'he is a Protestant you know.'

‘Let us suppose him a Roman Catholic, eh?’

‘Christy, why do you always say *Roman Catholic*? You know there is only one kind of Catholics.’

‘Of course. I suppose it is hearing that word so often from Mrs. Rochford and other people one gets into the way of it.’

‘It sounds so Protestant to hear you say it.’

‘Yes; I won’t do it again. But, tell me, would you marry him?’

‘I—I don’t think so.’

Esther was startled by the question and suddenly rising she walked away to the window. What idea could it have called up in her mind. She flushed up to the roots of her hair, her eyes dilated with a look almost of terror, and her lips quivered.

‘What were you thinking of?’ asked

Christy, quite curious and astonished ; ‘ tell me !’

She followed Esther and looked at her with inquisitive eyes.

‘ No, no ; don’t talk nonsense, Christy.’

The head was turned away from her. There was even a suspicion of tears in the voice.

‘ You are not vexed, Esther ?’ Christy said quickly and anxiously.

‘ No, no ; I am not. What made you think I was vexed ? Nothing of the sort. Just look at this hyacinth ; it is tumbling over.’

She had turned her back, and was holding in her fingers the stem of a huge purple-flowered hyacinth, with a heavy odour, half of cloves, that, if you shut your eyes as you smelled, called up, even this grey, mist-laden February morning, a memory of hot July days and crimson carnations yielding up their incense at the

fierce mandate of the sun-god. The mass of double bells had overweighted itself, and the head was all askew.

‘It wants a bit of wire,’ said a voice that made both turn round suddenly. It was Lanty who had entered the room in his usual abrupt fashion, and now stood before them, his books under his arm. ‘Eh ! how are you, Esther ? what a colour you’ve got ! Have you come to take your long last farewell of—her ?’ nodding his head at his sister. ‘I met Father Macklin as I came out College Gate, and he has been praising her till—oh, faith !—I wondered was the man making a mistake. Yes, I did.’

Then he turned round a chair and seated himself facing Esther.

‘Do you remember a promise you made me the other day ?’

‘The football match, Lanty, in the park—to-morrow, is it ?’

‘Yes, to-morrow ; the college against the

—th Lancers, Esther,' said Lanty in a low voice, fixing a melancholy look on her. 'Are you going to break that promise?'

'Ah, Lanty! what are you thinking about? I really won't forget it.'

'But you see you had nearly forgotten it; you said "to-morrow, is it?" You *are* coming, then? Now tell me, who will you take with you—Philomena or Graceless?'

'Lanty, you are dreadful! you must not give young ladies nicknames; it won't do. I had asked Grace Callan.'

'What!' called Christy, from the other side of the room; she had taken a feather brush and was flirting and flicking it about, repairing the neglects of the housemaid, in forgotten places. She was busy otherwise as well, pondering in her own mind Esther's manner a few minutes before. There was something extraordinary in it.

What could it be—Jocelyn? But that was impossible. There had been a dinner-

party at the Viceregal Lodge the night before ; she knew Esther had been there, and felt eagerly anxious to know what had gone on. She never would know, she felt sure of that ; but her curiosity was all the more unbounded.

Esther had met Nevil Jocelyn at the Viceregal dinner ; his mother and cousins had been there too ; and he had found it impossible to go near her. They had merely exchanged a few words of greeting. Well she remembered the words, and the look and the hand-pressure that had accompanied them ; they seemed, indeed, to have been present with her ever since. Christy's careless speech had called up a horrid thought into her mind—evoked a spectre that she was now never to lose sight of.

‘What !’ called Christy ; ‘Grace Callan going with you ? Oh, don't let her wear her red feather, I implore you !’

She came over to where they sat. She was looking pale and tired—probably with her work—but all the same she was bright and gay as ever.

‘Look at her,’ said Lanty ; ‘ she’s quite pale. Ah, my dear goodness ! “ the works of piety, spiritual and corporal,” disagree with you.’

‘ Now, Lanty !’ Esther said, reprovingly.

‘ Never mind him. I don’t care,’ Christy said, flicking the lineaments of a bust of Cleopatra with her feather brush.

‘ I only wonder,’ continued Lanty, ‘ how long this fit will last. Certainly not for a month.’

‘ If it lasts a month of Sundays it will do very well,’ said Esther ; ‘ that would bring us up to the summer vacation. Yes, and past it,’ she added, as if she had just made some astonishing discovery.

‘ Dear me !’ said Lanty, gravely ; ‘ you have discovered that. How do you make

it out? You are more clever than Mrs. Carew; she can't count beyond twenty.'

'Indeed I' said that lady. 'Just come and give me an account of my change: you shall see whether I can or not. If you please, sir, have you been to Edwards'? How de do, Miss O'Neil?' Mrs. Carew affected only to see Esther at that moment.

At the mention of Edwards, a well-known confectioner and cook of their district, Lanty and Christy signalled to each other and prepared to unite their forces. Mrs. Carew's face betokened impertinence as surely as lowering clouds portend storms. Instead of answering her question, her step-son stared at her, and rising from his chair, presented it to her, as if she were about to be seated.

'I am not going to sit down,' she said crossly; 'there is too much to be done. No, Christy, this white flower shows best

here.' She was moving some flower-pots as she spoke.

Her step-daughter laid down the feather brush and crossed over to Esther.

'Come upstairs to my room. I have something to say to you.'

'By-the-bye,' said Lanty, 'while I think of it, I had a note from Sugrue this morning. Christy, he desires his remembrance to you.'

'Christy, will you have the goodness to find those missing specimen glasses? They want two of the number for the dinner-table,' Mrs. Carew's sharp voice cried from the back room.

'A letter from Sugrue, is it?' repeated Christy, ignoring the summons of her step-mother. 'I don't believe you.'

'I wish you would find those glasses,' continued the sharp voice; 'and make haste to change your dress; it is nearly two o'clock.'

‘That’s it, I believe. You shan’t read it, though, Esther. That’s it!’ said Lanty.

He held out the letter among a bundle of others tantalisingly: Christy recognised the thick close black writing at once, and eyed it greedily.

‘Oh dear! help me, Lanty!’ shrieked Mrs. Carew from the back drawing-room, as if she were *in extremis*.

Lanty threw the bundle of letters on a chair, and rushed to her aid. She had mounted half-way up a step-ladder, which the servant had placed beneath the chandelier, and it had begun to shake, possibly owing to the fact of her attending more to the talk in the front room than to preserving her own equilibrium.

The ladder was only shaking a little, and she was by no means so frightened that she could not see and hear all that was going on in the next room. She distinctly saw Christy, the very moment after Lanty had

flung down his bundle of papers, pick out Sugrue's letter from them and slip it into her pocket. She marvelled much at this circumstance. What could her step-daughter want it for? What could there be in it to pique her curiosity? What did she want it for? There must be something in it! A whole host of contingencies rushed through her brain. Perhaps Sugrue and she sent each other messages through Lanty, without the latter being aware that he was an intermediary. She had heard of such things—that is to say, she had in reality only read of them; but in these days, when people who lead quiet provincial lives borrow so much of their experiences from books, and live so much in a possible rather than an actual life, she may be pardoned the suspicion.

She determined, by hook or crook, to see that note. Morally, she was by no means above petty tricks. They scarcely deserved

the name of intriguing, when they served her turn ; but she had not the activity of mind and body that complicated schemes demand. Besides, in her position they were not required. She made up her mind she would see that letter before night, if possible. She did not believe for an instant there was anything of consequence in it—there could not be—for many reasons.

There was a dinner-party that evening, to which the O'Neils were not invited ; as they ought to have been—or at least, they would certainly have been of that opinion had they heard of it. This festivity was ostensibly given for the Rochfords ; but in reality, though Christy did not know this, for Mr. Dawson.

As soon as Mrs. Carew had observed that gentleman's admiration of her step-daughter, she had determined to do all in her power to further the match. Mr. Dawson was forty years of age, and Christy little more

than eighteen, but that consideration did not weigh with her for an instant. He had five thousand a year—fifteen, she called it, even in her own mind, and as soon as the couple should be engaged, there is little doubt that she would announce the bridegroom-elect's income to be thirty thousand a year. People always halve the figures in these circumstances, and fifteen thousand a year, or even, allowing for casualties, seven thousand five hundred a year, had *éclat* enough and to spare. As to the difference of religion, Mr. Dawson was neither an Irish Protestant nor an English Churchman. He was a Dissenter, and, heretic though it be, the feeling against dissent is not so strong as against the State Church. The political element is absent, and in these days, when creed is but another name for faction, that absence counts for a good deal.

The marriage was to be celebrated in

London. What Roman Catholics may not do in Dublin is perfectly feasible in London or Paris, or, in fact, anywhere else ; and for many reasons a wedding in London would be preferable to one in Dublin. She had advanced pretty far with her plans, and had elaborated them with a finish barely justifiable as yet ; in fact, most people would say she was reckoning without her host. So far as Mr. Dawson was concerned, all was plain sailing, but Christy might be supposed to present a little difficulty. This Mrs. Carew positively declined to see. She credited her step-daughter with too much common-sense. A girl without a penny, and in her position ; without doubt she would be glad to catch at the chance, as any one else would. There was no prior attachment in this case, no romantic entanglement. Of course she had admirers, plenty of them. A girl with her advantages naturally had, but

there was nothing more. She herself had suspected that at one time that Mr. Sugrue, Lanty's tutor, had somewhat more than a friendship for his pupil's sister, but she thought she could answer for it that on her side there was nothing of the kind.

He never came near the house—almost never. Christina never met him elsewhere, and now he was away, and was likely to remain away for some months. They did not correspond—that she was sure of; and what, then, could she mean by snatching up that letter? Some trick she wanted to play on Lanty, no doubt. Still, Mrs. Carew determined to see it and make sure for herself.

There was not the slightest use attempting to drive Miss Carew into anything, and the subject was carefully avoided between them. Indirect pressure in plenty she had brought to bear for the last few days; that is, since she had discovered the state of affairs, Mrs. Carew preached hour-long

sermons on the text of poverty, lamented the family embarrassments, and discussed ways and means in detail in a manner that was perfectly new to her. Christy wondered not a little at the service in honour of Mammon, at which she was called on to assist every moment; but Mrs. Carew's vagaries and whims were never suffered long to disturb her equanimity.

Christy had the gift, when she chose, of despatching her attention abroad on more congenial excursions, whether in pursuit of Sugrue's image or into millinery shops, or, farther off still, to Spain, to watch the building of some favourite château she possessed there. Her step-mother's clear, sharp voice rose and fell, as she laid down general rules from particular instances, and wearied the very air with nonsense unchecked and lavish. Often there was art enough in her foolish tirades, which

sometimes had their veiled purpose below, from which it was the object of all this rhetoric to distract observation ; just as the plover squeals and circles most tantalisingly near your head at the moment when she wants to divert your attention from her nest.

‘ Come over to this chair,’ said Christy, who felt her pocket, as it were, burning her.

Just then a servant presented herself at the door.

‘ If you please, miss, there are four champagne glasses——’

‘ What !’ almost screamed the mistress, forgetting her nerves and springing down from the ladder ; ‘ more glasses broken ? Oh, my goodness ! Christy, do you hear me ?’

Christy hastily presented herself in the back drawing-room.

‘ Well, yes, rather. Can they not be sent for ?’

‘Sent for?’ echoed Mrs. Carew. ‘One would think you had a bank belonging to you. Go downstairs, Hester. Really, it is something too terrible to think of! Where is the money to come from for such waste and destruction? No, I’ll be no party to it. No more glass shall be bought for this house. Some one must economise and draw the line, and, of course, that some one must be me. *I* have a conscience, and *I* could no more venture to ask your father to do such a thing as to go to the expense of supplying the wicked, wanton, pure villainy of such servants as ours——’

Christy pulled the curtain close behind her; she wanted to turn off this tap, now in full flow and threatening to submerge in its fluid outrush the whole dry land underneath the firmament. Another time she would have been amused.

‘What is this they cost?’ she said, abruptly, to Mrs. Carew.

‘Don’t venture even to speak to me. They must be done without. What the Rochfords will think, I don’t know; and Harriet always accustomed to such perfect order, and—and elegance.’

This sentence became actually lachrymose towards its close.

‘Ah, well! I suppose the only thing will be to do without, or borrow them, and considering that the O’Neils are not asked, don’t you think we might as well not make these preparations so very obtrusive?’

Christy spoke in a hard cut-and-dried kind of voice, the effect of which was to change Mrs. Carew’s humour from a watery to a hot one.

‘I don’t care, I am sure!’ and indeed she did not. The season of Mansion House festivities was really over, and it was no longer worth while to cultivate the

civic dignitaries. 'I can't be expected to keep everything in my unfortunate head, scheming and worrying from morning to night to make both ends meet, and getting not a bit of consideration or thanks. I'm sure I wish I had married some wealthy merchant or another. I could give my orders out of an easy-chair, and not be wearing myself into my grave. What is life to one in this degrading poverty ?'

'Send to Sergeant Nugent for the glasses ; they are coming to dinner. Mamma, do you want me here, for Esther is by herself ?'

Without waiting for an answer, she swung the heavy folds of the curtain together behind her, effectually shutting out the reply, and rejoined Esther.

'Lanty,' she said to her brother, 'you will find some lunch on the sideboard, and

pray don't do any mischief in the dining-room.'

'Lunch on the sideboard,' grumbled Lanty; 'that means that old spiced round of beef again; anything is good enough for me, I suppose. By the same token, borrowing wine glasses reminds me, Esther, did you ever hear old Nugent's story of the spiced round at the ball supper in Galway? You know, in Galway, the people borrow and lend everything on earth. Some one owned a spiced round of beef that had gone wrong in the cooking, and was so hard that nobody could carve it. This was in great request, and figured everywhere at suppers. At last one fellow thought he had met that round of beef quite often enough in society, and, vowing to make an end of it, set to work to hack it down the middle with a carving-knife. Presently the lady of the house cast her eye upon him, attracted by his exertions.



“Thady Bodkin!” she called, “who taught you how to carve?” Then the full amount of the mischief he had done flashed upon her, and “Oh, good jewel!” she cried aloud, “look at the show he has made of Mrs. Maloney’s red round of beef!”

‘Yes, indeed, Master L——,’ observed his sister, ‘though you talk of our spiced round, I think you have pretty well spoilt its good looks. Now go, do, for they want the sideboard.’

He went off unwillingly, and the two girls remained the only tenants of the drawing-room.

‘It seems to me that I never see you now, Esther.’

‘Well, I might say the same to you; things go on as usual. I think we are all going to Rome for Easter.’

‘Rome! for Easter? Oh, Esther, how lucky you are.’

‘I wish with all my heart you were coming with us.’

‘I do too.’

Then she thought that to see Rome under Hugh O’Neil’s auspices might not be the charming treat it sounded. A vision of never ending religious observances and constant restraint supervened upon her mental vision. Rome with Hugh O’Neil could hardly be a pleasure.

At that moment a tap was heard at the door. Christy cried ‘Come in’ twice, but no notice was taken of the permission, so she rose impatiently and went to open it. As soon as there was space sufficient to admit of its passage, a bouquet, entirely composed of yellow roses, was thrust in, supported by a dirty hand.

‘If you please, miss—excuse me—I’m raily busy,’ said a voice in hurried accents from without.

Miss took the bouquet, to which was

fastened a card ; the dirty hand withdrew, and the door shut.

She advanced slowly, reading the message, which she detached and threw into Esther's lap.

‘ What a lovely bouquet ! Oh, Christy !’

It was a lovely bouquet. One large, three-parts blown rose formed the centre, set in an ethereal framing of soft maiden-hair fronds ; round it buds of that loveliest of roses, the Marshal Niel, shone in their own glossy dark-green leaves.

The owner of the bouquet turned her head from side to side critically, then laid it with affected *nonchalance* on the mantel-piece.

‘ It is well to be you. I wonder, or rather I should not wonder, if that had come from London. He has good taste, certainly.’

She bent her head to smell the roses.

‘ That I doubt, or you would have been

sent the bouquet, Esther, instead of me.'

This was a most disingenuous speech. However, Christy only meant to pay her friend a compliment.

'Tell me how soon I may congratulate you? He is fearfully rich, Chris,' said Esther, half mischievously.

'Now, Esther, once for all, I will not—no, I will not—have it. He is a perfect horror! and you know that always was my opinion.'

'Well, there, then, it shan't be teased. But, anyhow, don't punish the innocent for the guilty, and let us put those poor roses into water.'

'You may, I shan't,' replied their owner. Nevertheless, she looked on approvingly while Esther put the bouquet in a vase of water.

'Come now, the next time you see him you'll have one of them in your buttonhole

or in your hair, and then how charmed and happy he will be.'

'Will he just? If that's his only chance of happiness, I pity him.'

'You will change your mind; but remember you'll have to convert him.'

Christy exploded with laughter.

'If he had any religion to change, my dear; there's nothing to turn. Don't you know that a real, strict, bigoted Protestant is the easiest of all to convert. Any priest will tell you that. I'll wager to you that old Miss Rochford, who won't even keep an R. C. servant in her house, will "come over" before Mr. Dawson, or any one of his sort.'

'Terrible, isn't it?'

Esther looked awestruck and pitiful at once.

'Well, yes. I confess I dislike the monkey creed; but, Esther, it seems to me that if things go on as they are at

present, that you will have the task of converting some one yourself.'

She had her chin supported in the palm of her hand, and smiled with a mischievous inquisitive meaning as she said this. The smile soon left her face when she saw the effects of her words. Esther winced as if she were hurt, drooped her head, and turned it aside. She was sitting with her back to the light; but that did not prevent Christy from seeing the crimson flush that overspread her face and neck. She could have bitten her tongue out. For a few minutes the feather brush was industriously flourished. Anger with herself and pity for Esther occupied her mind solely. What a dreadful thing it would be if they were really attached to each other! Awful! Jocelyn of Mourne Abbey. The nephew of Lord Blaquiere and Lord Mayor O'Neil's daughter! Poor Esther! poor child! It was something not to be thought of.

Supposing even that the Jocelyns gave their consent—impossible idea!—to the match, Hugh O'Neil would refuse his, and glory in so doing. From an angle she could now see Esther's face in a mirror, and she was startled at its paleness.

'What a cruel creature she must think me!' said Christina to herself.

She stuck the feather brush head first into a china vase and went over and put her arm round her friend's waist, stooping her head and rubbing Esther's cheek with her own.

Esther submitted silently.

'I must go, Christy,' she said presently, 'since you won't come out.'

Christy had expected her to say something on the previous subject. Either to intimate that the question was one she did not wish alluded to, or that it had wounded her; however, she did neither, and the subject dropped then utterly.

‘Good-bye,’ said Christina. ‘I’ll see you soon again, Esther.’

Esther went away, looking nervous and preoccupied. Christina’s careless random words had made a wound that was not to be easily healed. Lanty reappeared from the dining-room, and met her on the stairs as she was leaving. He insisted, much against her will, on walking home with her.

Christy did not accompany her downstairs. She remained at the door of the drawing-room until she heard the hall-door clapped by Matthew, who had taken advantage of the general hurly-burly to go about all day long in the attire he most affectioned, to wit, dirty shirt sleeves. She took Sugrue’s letter out of her pocket and returned to her seat in the window. A step outside startled her ; she hastily swept the letter into a drawer, and determined to wait until the visitor had gone downstairs again.

She had a piece of sewing in her fingers, but very soon the sewing lay unheeded on her knees, and her eyes wandered to the outer world below. She leaned forward to try if she could see Esther, and was just in time to catch a glimpse of her tall, slim figure as she turned the corner. Lanty was walking with her, his face turned to hers so persistently, that he stepped into a huge pool of liquid mud.

Now they were both gone from her view. All seemed still, and she took out the paper and began to read it. It was more the nature of a memorandum than a letter, and ran as follows :

‘ You will get the book you speak of at O’Duffy’s shop, in Exchange Court. Two shillings is enough for it second-hand. What do you want twenty-five shillings for? I have not got it; and if I had I should not lend it to you. I hope you

have not been playing cards with that fellow Longleats again. I warned you last time that I never would help you again in this way. What business have you with those fellows, they are all too well off for you? Your account of the Mansion House ball was very amusing; it must have been good fun. Do keep out of mischief, and mind your work; you ought to take that Hillyard Prize. No; I have not been to the Alhambra, or any where else either; and if you want "news" of London I recommend you to take the *Morning Post* or the *Court Journal*, or ask your omniscient friend, Mr. Dawson, whom you seem to see so often.

‘Yours, etc.,

‘ANTONY SUGRUE.’

Now she had read it, read it word for word, slowly down to the thick black signature. There was a postscript below—a

blotted, evidently hurriedly written postscript.

‘ I am glad to hear what you tell me of ’
—now is that ‘ Mrs.’ or ‘ Miss ’ Carew, it
certainly was difficult to tell which—‘ Give
her my regards.’

‘ Regards !’ she repeated.

For a moment her face clouded over,
then she re-read the letter and consoled
herself. The postscript, after all, was the
essence of it, she assured herself, and she
mentally made a note of the address,
determining to write and tell him all she
had been doing.

Now what was to be done with the
letter? Lanty had picked up the bundle
again off the chair, so there was no re-
placing it. There was a slight allusion to
Lanty’s private affairs in it, which she
thought he might not like his stepmother
to become aware of.

How to manage? She determined to hand him the letter with the remark, literally true, that she had picked it up, and kept it until she could hand it back to him. The rest she postponed. Accordingly she did this.

Lanty gave her a mistrustful look, took the letter from her grumbling, and stuffed it in the pocket of his great coat, which he then hung upon a peg in the hall.

Five minutes later, Mrs. Carew, who was in the dining-room, and had heard through the open door, had it in her possession. She, too, was puzzled by the postscript at first; however, her clear head was not long encumbered by a doubt on the subject, and she popped the letter back, to keep Lanty's pipe company in his pocket, with the assurance of knowing that handwriting again wherever she might meet with it.



CHAPTER IV.

'Timon. You had rather be at a breakfast of enemies than a dinner of friends.

Alcib. So they were bleeding-new, my lord, there's no meat like 'em : I could wish my best friend at such a feast.'

Timon of Athens.

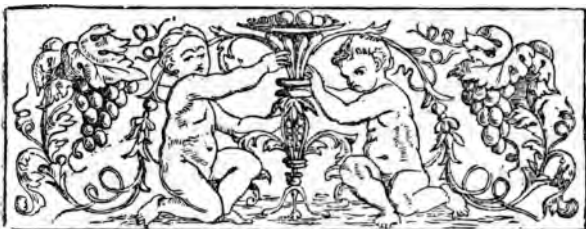
' **W**ELL, of course, you will do as you like ; but, after all, when a gentleman sends one such a lovely bouquet, it would be nothing more than civil to show one's appreciation.'

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'Yellow roses don't go well with red and white,' returned Miss Carew, in a careless

tone ; ‘and as for appreciating them, have I not put them in the post of honour in the centre of the table ? Take some out for your dress, if you like.’

She stretched out her hand to detach some buds from the yellow gleaming mass of the lovely bouquet. Her step-mother stopped her with a cry.

‘Don’t please ! I cannot think of such a thing. No—impossible !’

Christy buttoned the last button of her gloves in silence, and sat down opposite Mrs. Carew. They were both dressed punctually. It wanted yet five minutes of the hour appointed for dinner. All the wax candles were lighted, and burned steadily and brightly, and a glowing fire cast a warm refulgence over everything. The violets, of which there were several dishes, exhaled their odours quickly, as if they made haste to die and quit a scene so repugnant to them ; and a big china pot,

with a half-dozen hyacinths blossoming all at once in it, sent forth strong waves of perfume, that were perceived half-way down the stairs. A subdued murmur came from below, at intervals only, for Mrs. Carew was a clever manager, and had her household well in hand. She was tired, and so was Christy, and each sat busy with her own thoughts, and resting until the arrival of the guests should demand their renewed exertion.

Christy yawned twice, and almost wished in her heart that nobody might come. The fire was so delicious, and the room so still and comfortable, she fancied that to sit there and muse for hours alone would be enjoyment enough, especially as there was no one particularly interesting to her amongst the expected guests. How exquisitely the flowers smelled. The hyacinths were almost overpowering.

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bouquet of yellow roses, and from it to Miss Carew with an expression of wonder, envy, and amazement curiously blended.

Mrs. Rochford laughed, and then shrugged her shoulders. The motion said plainly to the watcher who knew her well, 'Time will show. Meanwhile, I only half believe you.'

'I'll punish every one of you,' said Christy to herself; 'you in especial, Susan Almond, for your impertinence. And I have the roses. Yes, and I will have the dress; and get them both for nothing into the bargain.'

More people came in. Every one had arrived now except Mr. Dawson. Eight struck, and at five minutes past the Crown solicitor had actually rung the bell, vowing that he would wait no longer, when the tardy guest arrived.

'Did it on purpose,' said Christy to Mr. Rochford, 'just to make a sensation.'

'It was not my fault, I assure you, Mrs.

Carew. It was owing to the delay in finding my luggage at Westland Row.'

'Luggage at Westland Row!' repeated she. 'You have been travelling?'

'Crossed to-day from London,' said Mr. Dawson, in an easy tone. 'It was fortunate for me that your dinner-hour was eight o'clock, otherwise I should have been forced to travel last night. The delays are very tiresome.'

'Ah, this unfortunate country of ours! Of course, of course!' said Mr. Carew. 'I was blaming you, not the railway management. I had actually rung for dinner. There it is now!'—Mathew was at the door—'so now, please, let us have no more procrastination. Mrs. Nugent, I believe I take you. I detest procrastination at all times, and in especial at dinner-time.'

So speaking the host led the way downstairs with the lady named, a good-humoured, plain-looking matron, who wore

a ball-dress, for she was going on with her daughter to a dance later in the evening.

There were fourteen people in all : the right number in order to accomplish perfect unsociability—just enough to make general conversation impossible, and particular chat difficult. As at first arranged, there were but twelve guests. Then it was remembered by Mrs. Carew that Miss Nugent would probably consider herself ill-treated, if the only available gentleman of the party was monopolised, as Mrs. Carew hoped and intended him to be, by Miss Carew ; and Mr. Conroy was asked for her. This made the number thirteen—one which she at once pronounced to be impossible. Sergeant Nugent having so strong a prepossession against it, that it was recorded of him that on one occasion he flatly refused to eat his dinner, or even to sit down to table, until a fourteenth guest was procured somehow. So a stray man, one of the kind

who sing and talk, and about whom no one ever asks questions, was improvised for the occasion.

More than half the contingent were relatives : a circumstance sufficient to stupefy any dinner-party. Relatives knew each other far too intimately to give themselves any trouble to be agreeable. Intimacy is the sworn foe of sociability. People who are complete strangers have a better chance of rising to the level of the occasion.

Captain Almond was sent down with Mrs. Rochford, whom he hated, and who hated him. He and his wife, her sister Susan, were very troublesome to the rest of their relatives ; however, they had to be taken notice of sometimes, and as he was rather afraid of this particular sister-in-law, there was another reason for so giving him into her charge on this particular occasion. His wife, who had been very pretty, and

was rather 'barracky' of manner, was not considered too important to be given into Lanty's custody.

Mrs. Carew bestowed herself on the sergeant, to whom she was gracious and sweet, because he was soon to be a judge, and who was very affable and pleasant to her, firstly, because she seemed to wish him to be so ; and, secondly, because her husband sent him plenty of briefs. Mr. Rochford took Miss Nugent, who was, however, indemnified by having Mr. Conroy placed beside her ; the master of the house, Mrs. Nugent. Mrs. Almond was sulky, for, as a military lady, she felt her rights infringed in being sent down almost last, and with the singing gentleman. Lanty, however, was seated on one side of her, and his good humour soon infected her and induced her to take a sensible view of affairs.

Mrs. Carew was tolerably contented with

her arrangements when she looked round at the circle assembled. Mrs. Rochford was too well dressed, she thought. Mrs. Rochford, in reality, had but one other dinner dress at her disposal, and that was one that had seen good service. If she had worn it Mrs. Carew would have been displeased for the contrary reason. Indeed, there was but little that Mrs. Rochford could do that would not be displeasing to Mrs. Carew. Before long, that lady allowed to herself that if there was a fault it was a fault on the right side, and if Harriet chose to wear such an expensive dress for what she knew was but a second-rate dinner-party, it was her own business.

Mr. Rochford eat his dinner stolidly, as was his wont; his companion, Miss Nugent, in no way interfered with him, and his dinner was a very good one. Mrs. Carew took care to order the dishes he liked, for it was her policy to humour him. He

was after that invisible star, Lord Bunratty, the real chief of the tribe.

The Crown Solicitor was deferential to him, though he often told his wife that Rochford's father had been a Catholic, and that he had apostatised and ratted within his own memory.

Mr. Rochford was not a pleasant kind of man, full of pride—family pride and class pride—and as to religion, as narrowly Evangelical as in politics he was narrowly Tory. His wife led him by a silken leash ; it was wonderful how the huge, stupid man obeyed her least wish while fancying himself, in every sense, lord and master. He talked in a big, hectoring voice, all the time repeating her ideas.

He was rich, that is, he had nearly three thousand a year ; penurious in small things and at the same time addicted to expensive luxuries such as law-suits. He was a passably good landlord ; owning land as he did

in one of the richest grazing counties in Ireland, it was not perhaps very difficult for him to be reasonable in his dealings with his tenants. He was fully alive to all his indulgences to them, and never ceased to complain of the ingratitude of a couple of graziers, whose leases he had renewed without exacting fines, and who, at the very next election, had declined to vote for the candidate he favoured.

This had been a great blow to him, and he had determined that for the future he would be no better than his neighbours. He did not speak much during dinner, at least during the first part of it. Mrs. Rochford talked a little about the weather to her brother-in-law Almond, whose tailor's bill she had recently paid, and whose consumption of wine it was now her pleasant task to supervise. Nearly opposite was his wife, who, while talking to Lanty, cast now and again anxious nervous

glances across the table. They were a study, this pair; when her eye met his they exchanged mutinous scornful looks, as if she sympathised with his sufferings and the state of tutelage and subordination Mrs. Rochford's neighbourhood implied. Again she would turn eyes full of warning and entreaties on her sister, who indeed saw everything, while she was angry with them both and pitied them at the same time.

‘Talking of extravagance, indeed,’ thought Mrs. Rochford, who was preparing a private lecture for both her sisters, ‘Susan was as bad in her way as Wentworth Almond was in his. She had no business to go to the Drawing-room, incurring expense without knowing how it was to be met. Mrs. Rochford wished in her heart they were both back in India.’

Mr. Rochford on coming in barely spoke to his troublesome brother-in-law. The very day that his wife had confessed to him

her generosity in settling the military tailor's account, he, walking along the Green to his club, had seen both the Almonds careering down Grafton Street on an outside car. He nearly took a fit on the spot, and registered a vow that was the last money of his they ever should see. He never took cars or cabs, he wore out more boots than any man of his age, even this season, when he had his horses in town, at his wife's instance. And indeed that lady often told herself that all the *eclat* of her equipage did not indemnify her for the eternal lamentations of her husband over the deterioration of his cattle on the cobblestones and asphalt. She was supposed to have made the best match of all the Poyntsett girls, though she had not married till pretty late in life. Mr. Rochford was rich, and held a good position in his county, but he was hard to deal with. 'A horrid old Turk !' indeed, according to

Mrs. Carew, who envied her sister's landau and pair, and thus indemnified herself by, so to say, sticking pins in its cushions.

There was another sister, who had married an English officer, a man of family unlike Captain Almond, who was nobody ; she came next in age to Mrs. Rochford, and resembled her in appearance and disposition ; but she never came to Ireland, and the rest of the family knew little about her ; it was rumoured among them that Major Blundell Browne's family looked down on her, and that her position among that aristocratic tribe was barely a comfortable one ; so she, too, if she had a carriage, had pins among her cushions.

Mrs. Almond was very like Mrs. Carew, only a shade deeper as to colour. She was a year younger, but had a more worn look, and the Indian sun had turned her complexion a colour that looked odd in contrast with her fair brown hair and blue eyes. She was

the better-looking woman, taking all her points singly, of the two. Her eyes were a beautiful deep colour and were softer of expression than her sister's, but they lacked something in the way of steadfastness that distinguished the other. Her figure was slighter and more graceful, but it wanted the dignity of carriage and uprightness of Mrs. Carew's. Her whole bearing in short seemed characteristic somehow of her life, shifting, yet interesting; irritating, yet pathetic; amusing and always more or less unprincipled. Her brothers-in-law, especially Carew, were kinder to her than her sisters were; they always maintained that she had thrown herself away. Whereas Rochford, mindful of the episode of the outside car, which petty expense he characteristically held of greater account than the going to Court, declared openly that the Almonds were well-matched. Nevertheless she could soften him, too, and

had done so on emergency. She had no children. It was lucky that it was so, people used to say. Mrs. Carew, indeed, insisted even in her sister's presence, that it was a special intervention of Providence in favour not merely of the Almonds, but of all their connections. The poor woman could not venture to gainsay her openly, but in her heart she had bitter doubts of the wisdom of the same ruling, and thought to herself if their one baby had been left her things might have gone differently, not only with her husband, but with herself.

‘Well, well,’ said Mrs. Rochford, to herself, watching her laughing, and listening to her nephew’s talk, ‘how she can do it, passes me. One would imagine she had not a care in the world.’

And she felt a little scandalised ; people like others to wear their insignia of misfortune just as they ought to wear black for

departed relatives. She feared Susan was rather reckless. To tell the truth, Susan had a difficult life of it; she had to conciliate these prosperous sisters and their husbands, to take her own husband's part against them all day, and the next go over altogether to their camp and bemoan his misconduct. And all the time she would agree with him in private that they wronged him and ill-treated him, that Carew's allegations on such and such occasions were unfounded and malicious. She had to make the best of things all round so far as she could, to nurse and cherish the sickly plant of self-esteem, that still dragged out a lingering life in this feckless ungrateful soil, and at the same time to make what she could for herself out of the vicarious sympathy she met as she went along. She took all the amusements she could. Having sought it first as a refuge and relief from home worries, she continued to do so as a habit.

She was now watching Mr. Dawson's progress with Christy, and was amused with the nonchalance with which the young lady received his laboured and strongly pronounced attentions.

Mr. Dawson took particular pains with his conversation, and uttered the tritest remarks in a low tender tone, that gradually irritated her past bearing. She answered him in a voice that was unnecessarily loud, and did all she could to drag her neighbours into the conversation.

One of them, her uncle Rochford, who was by no means obtuse, saw the humour of the joke, and gave her a look which said so plainly 'I decline to spoil sport,' that, foiled in her intention, she changed her tactics and fooled Mr. Dawson to the top of his bent.

Mrs. Rochford was surprised ; Mrs. Carew delighted ; Mrs. Almond alone, having more experience in such matters,

saw the imp in Christy's eyes, and formed her own conclusions.

‘There’s nothing in that ; she has far too much to say to him not to be making a fool of him. And what a chance she is throwing away !’

She thought if she were eighteen once more, a handsome face and good address would not catch her so easily again. What was it all without money ? Thirty-three does not see with the eyes of eighteen, in which fact lies its chief loss. And if *she* was again eighteen—really eighteen—she would do exactly as the saucy brown-eyed girl opposite her was doing. But she meant to tell her what she thought, for, remote as it might seem, she had an interest in this match ; it was another wealthy connection, and though the man looked awfully ‘shoppy,’ he might be useful. She intended to be very civil to him when he came up to the drawing-room after dinner.

In this frame of mind she put her arm round Christy as they followed the other ladies upstairs.

‘Are you not a merciless little wretch?’ she whispered, with a bantering tone, into which she tried to infuse something that she thought might pass for affectionate interest.

Christina disliked and distrusted Mrs. Almond, and she swung herself loose from the encircling bare arm with a deft movement as they turned the corner of the staircase.

‘What *do* you mean, Mrs. Almond?’

‘Oh! touching innocence!’ sneered the elder lady; ‘it doesn’t know—of course not!’

‘No!’ retorted Christina, sharply; ‘I do not.’

They were just at the drawing-room door, and Christina drew to one side to let her companion go in first. She

hoped thus to get rid of her, as she wanted to go down and collect some sweets for the children, who had been put to bed before their usual time.

Mrs. Almond had just swept in when a small white figure darted past her, with a squeak and a flutter, out of the back drawing-room and upstairs.

It was Minna, needless to say, who had taken advantage of her nurse's absence to descend on a marauding expedition.

'Begone!' cried Miss Carew, clapping her hands after the retreating white speck. 'I'll punish you, miss.'

She went downstairs and collected a plate full of sweet-stuff, with which she ascended to the nursery.

Elsie was sitting up in her crib half awake and rubbing her eyes. Minna had withdrawn altogether under the bed-clothes, and gave no sign.

‘Were you downstairs, Elsie, like that bad girl?’

‘No; I didn’t—didn’t stir.’

‘Very well, then; here is orange-pudding and meringue for you, and she is not to have a bit. You hear? See, Elsie, don’t take the plate into bed. You just lean over, and you can eat it off this chair. Mind, now!’

From the other bed came a prolonged whine, gradually increasing in volume.

‘Hah! I can hear you, miss,’ went on Christina. ‘Now you are punished for your naughtiness. Not one atom for you. Elsie was good.’

‘Good, indeed!’ retorted Minna, through her sobs. ‘Just ’cause she was afraid. She was afraid of nine eyes under the stairs.’

‘If I only hear you talk such nonsense, I’ll——’

Under the bed-clothes vanished Minna

once more, now roaring heartily. Christy went downstairs, after one more parting injunction to Elsie not to give her naughty sister any share of her reward.

As may be supposed, before Miss Carew had reached the foot of the nursery stairs, this injunction had been thrown to the winds by both. She probably had expected this, for she had put quite enough for both children on the plate.

In the dining-room the chairs had been closed up. Captain Almond breathed freely now that he was rid of his sister-in-law's hateful supervision, and began to crack filberts and to talk in a supercilious, patronising tone to Mr. Dawson, whom he chose to consider his inferior in every possible way.

Mr. Rochford turned round his shoulder as far as he could to his troublesome connection, and half hoped that the fellow might cause a scene, as, in that case, he

would be provided with a good excuse for declining to meet him again.

‘It must be freezing to-night,’ observed Sergeant Nugent. ‘How that fire blazes!’

‘Yes,’ said Carew. ‘You are going to the Chief Justice’s hop, are you not?’

‘I believe I am, indeed,’ groaned the Serjeant, a jolly looking, red-faced ancient; ‘may the devil fetch their gaieties for them! A man has no peace of his life.’

Rochford laughed sympathetically and maliciously too. He also liked the fireside better than those amusements. Carew and he and the Sergeant were old friends, and dropped at once into an easy, unembarrassed gossip. Dawson, who, now that the ladies were gone, no longer felt the need of posturing, and enjoyed again the use of his shrewd practical brain, wanted to shake off the captain, whose boasting, horsey drivel was utterly incomprehensible to him. Lanty was sitting next the ser-

geant, and saw the desire of his intended brother-in-law.

‘Like to change with me, eh?’ he asked.

‘I’m rather too close to the fire.’

The exchange was gladly effected, and Lanty seated himself in a side-long attitude facing Mr. Almond. He had to look after this interesting personage for about an hour to come at the least, and he felt some misgivings as to his success. Captain Almond eyed the phalanx of four, who had drawn their chairs together, and evidently with no intention of taking him into their intimacy. Not that anything of the sort was expressed in the faintest manner. Carew was a perfect host, and Almond had no fear of being controlled in any way by him. Dawson was a stranger to him, and so was Nugent. Rochford was the only enemy there, and clown and rustic and country farmer as he was, Mr. Rochford could render a gentleman and an

officer in her majesty's service, who felt perfectly justified in applying those epithets to him in his own mind, extremely ill at his ease.

'Trouble you for those candy things,' said Lanty, designating a dish of fruit farther down the table.

'I think we may have some skating, if this frost only lasts. Ponds all so full, too.'

Now that he had begun to talk, Lanty felt that he would not have much difficulty. The only real obstacle to his easy familiarity had been the difference in their respective ages. Almond was nearly forty. To be sure, he was everything that is contemptible in point of character, still that did not altogether do away with the difference.

Captain Almond handed the dish with a grunt that might have meant anything, helping himself at the same time with his

disengaged hand to the largest frosted specimen it contained.

‘We hardly ever get any skating here,’ pursued the youth undauntedly. ‘I suppose you would prefer a Canada winter?’

‘Rather! Nothing but mud here.’

‘I want a glass of Madeira. That’s it, just behind the governor’s elbow. Hand it on, please, Conroy.’

Lanty, on getting the decanter, presented it courteously to the still sulky captain.

The attention mollified him, and before long, feeling the need of self-assertion and appreciation, his tongue loosened, and he began to talk freely enough to Lanty, who contrived to include the other two young men in the conversation.

The others were discussing the prospects of the farmers.

‘Have you as bad weather on your side

of the water ?' asked Mr. Rochford of Mr. Dawson.

' Pretty bad indeed ! Spring work is in arrear, and, as a consequence, spring sales are expected to be dull.'

Spring sales did not concern Mr. Rochford in the least. In fact, he barely gathered the meaning of the second part of Mr. Dawson's sentence. Ireland is a buyer, not a seller, and takes but little account of the interests of sheetings and shirtings.

' I saw a good deal of water lying on the fields about Merrion as I came up this evening.'

' Merrion and Sandymount, eh ?—the Pembroke township, as they call it,' said Carew. ' Yes, low-lying and badly drained, but it is improving fast. I recollect that place a stretch of swampy fields.'

' I drove through it,' said Mr. Dawson. ' It is a splendid suburb certainly ; one

would never imagine it was so good. Fine houses, and to all appearance well-kept. I don't know why it is,—Dublin never gives one a favourable impression at first. Perhaps it is the situation of the terminus, or the approach to it.'

'I should say it is both the terminus itself and the approach to it,' said Mr. Rochford, with a contemptuous laugh. 'Filthy pen! Then you see the railroad runs through a back region leading to it. Indeed, once you reach Lansdowne Road, you get a fair sample of Ireland. Look at those fields that are, as you say, under water now: in summer they're blooming with nettles and docks and ragweed and scutch; and then look at the width of the ditches, and look at the backs of those houses in Shelburne Road, and their gardens: for varied, squalid filthiness you won't beat them anywhere in this country—hardly out of it, either! And there

they are displayed under the very eyes and almost the noses of every foreigner that comes into the country.'

'I must confess I agree with you there,' said Carew.

'Taking everything, from the Kingstown landing-place to Westland Row, we do show all the worst points at the very beginning. There is a wall in front of one of the handsomest terraces facing the harbour, the coping-stone has fallen off it bit by bit, and there it is, dismantled and ruinous-looking, and giving the whole place a dilapidated, neglected look, for years and years there, as you say. Merrion and Lansdowne Road and the dirty hovels about Vavasour Square—well named, by Jove!—a lot of hovels, too.'

'I never can overcome my feeling of surprise when I drive through Merrion Square and Stephen's Green,' began Mr. Dawson. 'One expects the other thing, because it is

what we have been told of and have read of. It is really odd that within a stone's throw of Lansdowne Road, there should be miles upon miles of splendid houses—no suburb of London has handsomer. I assure you, I was astounded; and I have heard many tourists say the same thing.'

'I dare say, indeed; and these are the people who want Home Rule! Ugh!' grunted Mr. Rochford, 'Dublin is taxed ten shillings in the pound, and look at the mud of Sackville Street! I declare to you, Carew, there is a hole before the General Post Office to-day that would hold an omnibus.'

'Whose fault is this, may I ask?' Mr. Dawson looked round the group with a questioning air, as of one seeking for information.

'The particular committee of the Corporation whose department it is, I should say,' the Sergeant replied. 'There is a

contractor. I don't know why it is—not want of water, anyhow.'

'The footways are the worst,' Mr. Rochford said; 'and that's the business of the individual householders, as are also their hall-door steps. But they never clean one or the other.'

'Oh, come! never?' exclaimed Sergeant Nugent.

'Never,' maintained the other. 'They may sweep them now and again; but they, as a rule, and, as compared with London, never really clean them. Bah! no wonder the death-rate is so high; and nearly all the diseases are caused directly by dirt.'

Carew struck in:

'That's too strong! The people are too poor to be very cleanly. It is the tendency of cleanliness to cause hunger—that's well known. And you know very well how insufficiently fed these people are. Don't mind all our friend Rochford says, Mr.

Dawson : he is rather given to pessimistic views. This country is steadily improving.'

'Ah! In spite of this agitation—in spite of Home Rule? You think so.'

The worthy sergeant began to drink his claret in a very hurried manner, as if affected by a sudden thirst. Carew smiled maliciously.

'I'll refer you for all information pertaining to that organisation to my brother-in-law, Mr. Rochford, one of the earliest Home Rulers—I might say, one of the founders and promoters of the movement.'

The sergeant burst into a hearty laugh, but Mr. Rochford's face assumed an apoplectic tinge. Mr. Dawson suspected a mystification, and turned a puzzled countenance to the angry gentleman.

'No, no ; nothing of the sort. Carew, you ought to know better. By the Lord Harry, who would——'

‘Ha, ha !’ laughed the crown solicitor ;
‘now own up, Rochford ; didn’t you belong
to it in the beginning or did you not cut it
in ’72 ?’

‘I did. Certainly I did. And allow
me to tell you why I joined it. Because I
held it to be less unconstitutional than the
government that drove me into it. And
why did I withdraw from it ? Because it
became revolutionary, and embraced the
tenets, if not the name, of Fenianism.
And for another reason. *I* don’t care who
hears me. My party came into power
again ; and you might as well quarrel with
the opposition for dropping that particular
title when they go into office, as with me
for dropping Home Rule when I had no
longer any necessity to hamper Gladston-
ianism. A Tory was and is as much out
of place in the Home Rule party as the
cygnet among the ducks. Pooh ! the
whole thing is dead now.’

‘Dead! Home Rule dead?’ echoed Mr. Dawson.

‘As dead as—as a devilled red herring,’ replied the country gentleman, who was feeling in his pockets. ‘There, I’m after forgetting my cigar case, Carew; you know I can’t smoke those strong ones of yours.’

‘Try one of mine,’ said Mr. Dawson, handing him a case as he spoke.

‘The fire’s gone out in the study,’ said Lanty, who had left the room and now returned.

‘Never mind! Tell Matthew to see to it,’ said his father. ‘We’ll smoke here.’

‘Dead!’ repeated Mr. Dawson, in a puzzled voice. ‘Home Rule dead! eh! you think not.’

He was looking at the sergeant, who had also taken a cigar from his case, and was smelling it and biting the end, while his eyebrows and wrinkled

forehead seemed to say 'no' to Mr. Rochford's decisive opinion.

'Don't mind him,' said their host, blowing out a huge mouthful of smoke, which was the first to taint the hot air of the room, and went curling and twining in a multitude of wreaths before the black marble mantelpiece. 'Don't mind him, I say. He is keeping his belief warm for the Killenmaule election. Ha! ha! Almond, I say, try one of these cigars, and don't smoke that cigarette. I can't answer for that cavendish.'

'*I* can,' replied his son, coolly; 'it is very good.'

The crown solicitor took his cigar out of his mouth and gave Lanty a look of affected surprise.

'Be gone to your tea, and then to bed, sir. Who on earth allowed you to be here?'

Lanty was holding a lighted spill to his

cigarette, and looked pathetically at his father, and from him to his newly-lighted cigarette. He had not the slightest intention of moving.

‘Ha! ha! little un!’ grinned Captain Almond; ‘ought to be in bed, eh?’

Lanty made a grimace at him.

‘By-the-bye, sergeant,’ said Mr. Carew suddenly, ‘I met the brother of your Killenmaule parish priest to-day; and, indeed, I did my best to get him to come and dine with you; but he would not.’

‘Ah!’ observed the sergeant sleepily, ‘I dare say not. They think I am hardly sound enough on the University Question, and his reverence won’t commit himself in any way. I understand them. Ha! ha!’

‘The Catholic University question?’ inquired Mr. Dawson.

‘Of course, the Catholic University question. What other, I should like to know?’

‘May I ask what objection you can have to that?’

‘Well, then, I’ll tell you,’ observed the sergeant. ‘I have every objection on earth; I did all I could to help to abolish the State Church here, because it was an injustice, and it elevated one class at the expense of another, and now I don’t choose to give the lie to my own profession, and to proceed to endow that other class—and that is what a state grant to a Catholic university would amount to.’

‘Ah!’ added Carew, ‘the real fact is—how would you set about creating the university? Even if they got the money and the charter, where are the professors to come from?’

‘The English converts—the Oxford men,’ said Mr. Conroy, from the opposite side of the table. ‘I am told that they are all looking out for it as a provision for themselves.’

‘Whew! I don’t think that would be found to pay by any means. Take the surplus fund of the disestablished Church to create a Catholic university, and to provide a means of living for the ’verts!’

‘Seething the kid in the mother’s milk, eh?’ growled Rochford. ‘You need never pretend otherwise to me, Carew; it’s these priests that want it, and not the people. How are all your petitions got up? By the parish priests and in the parish churches. How are the subscriptions obtained? By demands made from the altars and the pulpits, and the money is collected in the churches, and yet you’ll tell me the people want it.’

‘Well,’ retorted Lanty, moved by a feeling of *esprit de corps* to opposition, though internally he approved, ‘and what other way would you have it to be done in the country parts? Is not the chapel the

natural place, where all the people are assembled and easily got at ?

‘That’s so,’ added Mr. Carew ; ‘but, into the bargain, these annual subscriptions are a heavy burden on the people, and still more on the priests. The fact is, really, they all come out of the priests’ pocket indirectly. Not a doubt of it. The people give so much to the Church, what they can spare you understand, and if ten shillings go to the Catholic university, it means ten shillings instead of a sovereign to their priest. They are all poor enough together.’

‘Hah !’ cried Mr. Dawson, ‘and tell me, do you think that a large class suffers by the non-existence of a sectarian university ? I put the question to you, Mr. Carew, as a Catholic.’

‘Ay !’ sneered Rochford, ‘why didn’t you enter Lanty, then, at that Stephen’s Green institution ?’

‘A large class,’ repeated Mr. Carew, taking no notice of his brother-in-law’s characteristic gibe, ‘in the position to afford a university career to their sons, does not exist in Ireland. I must say I do not know where the students are to come from for this university, when they get it. I fear, indeed, it will stand empty, or almost empty, for a long time. You must keep in mind that the Penal Laws are only recently, that is one generation back, removed. Few, or no Catholics join a university for the mere arts’ degree—they could not afford it—they all go in for the professions, and indeed I think the Queen’s Colleges answer them very well, and Trinity here. I don’t like separation myself, there is something new about it.’

‘New.’ Mr. Dawson, detecting the tone of dislike in which this was said, and putting two and two together in his own

mind. 'May I ask are you a Conservative, then?'

'Conservative, man? Don't you know I am a Catholic?'

'*Cela n'empêche pas,*' thought Mr. Dawson, but he said nothing.

'Carew,' asked Sergeant Nugent abruptly, 'where did you say you met Georgehegan?'

'Just as I came out of court to-day. He was waiting for Sergeant Bompus, and beguiling the time flirting with Judy Fogarty, the apple-woman.'

'By-the-bye,' remarked Mr. Dawson, 'I was told that she was famous for her repartee. I tried her one day, but, indeed, I can't say I thought her very encouraging.'

'What did she say to you, Mr. Dawson?' cried Lanty, breathless with attention, and laying down his cigar.

'I wished her "Good-morning," and re-

marked what a fine day it was. She was smoking a very short and black pipe—the shortest and blackest I ever saw in my life. I wonder her nose did not take fire. She looked at me, moved this pipe from one corner of her mouth to the other, and said, quietly, “It would be the same”—pause—“if you were dead.”’

The gravity and seriousness with which this was related was inimitable. The listeners with one accord burst into a shout of laughter. Lanty, who alone of them all realised the *raconteur's* frame of mind, was convulsed.

Christy, when she came down from the nursery, in order to avoid her friend Mrs. Almond, went straight to Miss Nugent. That young lady had seated herself where she could see the clock on the chimney-piece, which, for a wonder, was going, and which, unhappily for her ease of mind, was nearly twenty-five minutes fast.

‘You are going to the Delamars’ ball?’ said Christy. ‘We were going, too, but we had to refuse it.’

Then she sighed deeply.

‘I don’t know if it is going to be any great things,’ replied the young lady, complacently looking at her long-trained skirt.

‘I should like to have a chance of finding out that for myself,’ replied Miss Carew, mournfully.

The other ladies were all seated near the fire, the coffee had just been brought in, and Mrs. Nugent was poking short-sightedly at the lumps of sugar with a pair of very unmanageable sugar tongs. She gave it up at last, and, after dropping several bits on the floor, helped herself with her fingers.

‘Won’t you take some coffee?’ said Christy, when the tray came round.

‘No, thank you; it makes my face so hot, always.’

‘So it does mine ; but I don’t care. I wish you would play us something. Do ; the candles are lighted on the piano.’

‘No, please, Miss Carew, don’t ask me, I really can’t.’

‘That means that you don’t want to unbutton those gloves again. I don’t think I ought to spare you. There’s Mrs. Almond to sing, anyhow, so I’ll let you off.’

Mrs. Almond was, like her husband below stairs, a little on the outside of the circle round the hearthrug, and when Christy came over and asked her to sing, she replied, calmly, that she thought she might as well.

‘What will you have ?’ she asked, pulling off her gloves.

‘Anything you will give us,’ replied the young lady, turning to lead the way to the piano.

As they passed the table where the

bouquet of roses was, Mrs. Almond leaned down, and, putting her face close to it, sniffed at them rapturously.

‘Lucky girl!’ she said, meaningly to Christy, who was in the act of putting a sheet of music on the stand for her.

Christy gave her an angry look, and marched off straight, leaving her to turn over the leaves for herself.

The song was an old one that suited her voice well. ‘My mother bids me bind my hair.’

Her voice was a fine contralto, powerful and fairly well trained; but, even to Mrs. Carew’s prejudiced ears, lacking the sweetly sympathetic tones of Esther O’Neil’s.

Mrs. Almond was thinking that her husband would probably be asked to sing a duet with her, and though she knew the words and accompaniment by heart, she

sang the refrain 'While Lubin is away,' once too often. Christy thought it was done to tease her. As a rule, Susan Almond knew everything that Mrs. Carew knew, and Christy flashed a suspicious, indignant look at the vocalist, who in truth had something very different in her head ; and then the young lady began to talk in an undertone to Miss Nugent, who, however, promptly rebuked her for this breach of decorum. The song ended, and Mrs. Almond came and took the vacant seat on the ottoman between the two girls.

'You are dying to be off, Miss Nugent ; I can see that,' she said.

'Oh, no !' disclaimed the young lady, effusively, but looking at the clock as she spoke.

'Here they are now !' cried Miss Carew, seeing the drawing-room door open.

It was only Lanty, to the disappointment of Miss Nugent.

‘Here *I* am. I’ve been turned out of the room,’ he observed, in an aside to his sister. Then to Miss Nugent, ‘I left them all below—left the feast of reason and flow of soul to come and talk to you, Miss Nugent.’

‘Did you, Mr. Carew?’

‘I did, then,’ continued Lanty, fixing his eyes upon her with an expression of adoration and speaking in tones of the profoundest conviction. ‘What damage you’ll do at the ball to-night? My goodness! you’ll be the queen of beauty. Yes, faith and honour! Christy, why don’t you ever have a frock like this? I call it perfection. Tell me,’ he went on, sliding himself still closer to her on the ottoman, ‘when am I to have that photograph you promised me, eh?’

‘The reward of precocity, is it?’ asked Miss Nugent, who was a rather pretty, pert girl. ‘Darling child, don’t be sitting on my flounces!’

‘Cruel!’ murmured Lanty.

At that instant the door opened again, and, to Miss Nugent’s intense delight, gave admittance to the whole party of gentlemen.

Mrs. Almond’s eyes were turned on the incomers with an anxious expression, which, however, vanished as soon as they fell on her husband’s figure.

The Nugents left almost immediately, and with them the two strange young men; so the party had now become almost a family one. Christy wished in her heart that it was so completely, but Mr. Dawson showed no signs of following the departing guests’ example. No sooner were they gone, than he at once left the group standing about the fire, and with an air that was unmistakably a proclamation of ‘honourable intentions,’ seated himself as close to Miss Carew as the ottoman would permit. Christina busied herself with a glove-

button, but found an opportunity to note the significant glances which Mrs. Carew and her sister telegraphed to each other.

There was no help for it. He began to talk in a voice pitched in that key which has somehow come to be accepted as the suitable one in these peculiar circumstances. Christy listened patiently for a few seconds to a criticism of the pantomime, delivered with all the feeling and suppressed passion of a declaration of the impossibility of existing without her; then her eyes, wandering round in search of a loop-hole of escape, met Mrs. Almond's fixed on her with a semi-sneer, semi-approval in their look, that put the finishing stroke to her patience. She rose abruptly, and went to Mrs. Rochford, who made room for her in a corner of the sofa where no one could follow her.

'Well, Chris,' she said, in her comfortable full voice, 'how are you getting

along?' She saw that Miss Carew was on the verge of showing bad temper, and meant this soothingly. 'Susan teasing you? Never mind her. Herbert!' she called to her husband, 'you are never going down to smoke again at this hour?'

Mr. Carew was leading Dawson and his brother-in-law out.

'Only a moment, Harriet. Don't be alarmed!'

Wentworth Almond, who had not been asked to go with them, threw himself into an easy-chair in a far corner and sulked behind an illustrated paper. His wife glanced to her sisters.

'All right, you see,' she murmured under her breath.

Mrs. Rochford thought to herself it was by no means the first of his conversions she had heard of. Through Mrs. Carew's mind merely ran an unpronounced feeling of

thankfulness that she had been spared a scene.

‘What capital fish you always seem to get, Caroline. I never saw finer turbot.’

‘Glad you liked it, Harriet. I fancied, as usual, you were going to abuse me for giving you anything so good. That is your usual style, you know.’

Mrs. Carew spoke with a snappish voice and look.

‘Now for a row!’ thought Christy. ‘I wish they would go.’

‘Oh no, Caroline!’ returned the eldest sister with dignity; ‘necessary and suitable outlay can never be found fault with; but I must say I disapprove of extravagance and unwarrantable needless display.’

This was the first thunderbolt of a storm that had been long brewing. Since that drawing-room night, when Mrs. Carew distinguished herself by her dress, Mrs. Roch-

ford had never found a favourable moment to unload her mind. The other knew well that she only wanted an opportunity to do so, and, tired of eluding an outbreak, which must come sooner or later, now deliberately provoked the conflict. Christy saw the lowering clouds and wisely beat a retreat to the back drawing-room, whence she could hear and see.

‘I don’t quite see it, Harriet. My husband certainly is not an estated man, he is only a professional, and I am obliged to make a certain appearance—you know perfectly well that keeping up appearances is an absolute necessity. Of course I know what you would say. The disparity between Edward’s age and mine, the little children, and then Christina and Lanty, I know all that.’

Here she paused for breath. The glibness with which she had run off her long-prepared defence had exhausted her.

Mrs. Rochford's face meantime was a study of patience, contempt, and amusement blended.

'I have no business whatever, Caroline,' she began, in a tone as if waiting to recall the other to the question in point, 'to interfere. I don't dream of dictating to you as to your disposal of your dress allowance—dear no! What I mean is this. Taking *certain circumstances* into account (a bill of Carew's now nearly two years in her husband's possession), I think it was a piece of sinful waste on your part to think even of having a new court dress. My old one was quite good enough for me.'

Christy, from her place, saw Lanty passing into the room, and beckoned to him with one finger.

'What,' he asked sulkily. 'Hey, a shindy? Lack! I wouldn't miss it for the world.'

'Well, perhaps so, Harriet,' Mrs. Carew

replied, acrimoniously ; ‘but I should not like to be one of the people who go year after year for ever to the drawing-rooms in the same old clothes. I am told that these Quorns make bets as to the people’s dresses and how often they will appear and reappear in them.’

‘Hah ! the people ought to send them their bills to pay.’

Mrs. Rochford’s temper was short as her heart was good. She saw that her opponent had a bad case and that she knew it.

‘You say nothing about Susan’s going,’ burst out Mrs. Carew, her eyes blazing. ‘I’m sure that was as criminal as my sinful waste, as you are pleased to call it. She ought not to go at all. But I can tell you this, Harriet Rochford, it is necessary for me to go ; and I’ll go respectably attired as long as I do go. God knows it’s not to amuse myself I do it. I am not one of those who can’t stay quiet at home’

(this was for Harriet Rochford, who hated living in this country), 'neither am I one of those who are eternally running after excitement and distractions.' (This was for Susan Almond, who sat near, with a face puckered ready for crying.)

'Fireworks!' commented Lanty, 'and after them, waterworks. Here's Susan feeling for her handkerchief. What a day you're having? Harriet Rochford!' he mimicked; 'hark, how they call each other by their names. But I've observed whenever they dine *en famille* like this they hold a ruction after it. They eat their dinner, then they pick a bone together. Now it's Susy's turn. She's been gay and festive, too. She'll catch it, eh? I say, where's that worse half of hers? where's Wentworth?'

'Sh!' said Christy; 'in there. Listen to her trying to cry.'

'You are really unkind,' Wentworth's

wife was saying—‘Caroline, you are indeed, when you know the trials I have, and the endless efforts I make to keep him straight—make every rag I wear myself; and I should like to know, if I didn’t try to keep him in a little society, and not have him think himself the poor outcast, you would all like to make him!’ She stopped for an instant to take breath. Neither she nor her sisters observed Lanty’s head appear at that instant at the door, and disappear again, after a hasty reconnoitring glance around. ‘You would, Harriet. It’s all nonsense! You know it. Giving a dinner-party, and asking me and not Wentworth—as if I would go without my husband. You little know how he felt it; and he broke out again directly. A pretty fortnight I had with him; and not knowing if we had got our extension or not, and whether we should not have to join immediately. You needn’t

say that. Wentworth can behave himself : look how he has done it to-night.'

Just as she said this, the possibility flashed upon her that he was in the room, listening to her. She turned her head hastily to make sure. No, he was not there. At that instant Lanty, who had run off on an expedition downstairs, returned breathless to Christina.

'It is all up! He is mortal, and going it like mad among the bottles on the side-board. I've sent Mat for a cab. Get her out.'

In the act of turning her head back after her glance at the chair, Mrs. Almond's eye caught Christy's. The look was enough. She hastily passed her handkerchief over her face, and left the room at once.

'I sent Mat for a cab,' said Lanty to her. He saw she understood. 'Come along, and we'll get him off quietly. Christy, get her cloak for her.'

‘Oh, Lanty, you are a good fellow!’ she said effusively, running down as fast as she could. ‘Don’t say anything about it, she whimpered, on catching sight of her lord and master.

Christy wrapped her cloak about her shoulders: it was near at hand, in the back dining-room.

‘All right!’ replied Lanty; and the cab drove off, without anybody, save the two young people, being the wiser.

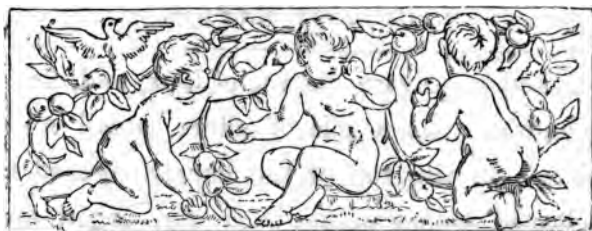
Christy went back to the scene of the fray. Mrs. Almond’s departure had cooled down the atmosphere. Her sister was thinking she had said too much, and that she had merely gone out to prevent herself being overcome by her feelings.

‘Gone!’ cried both. Christy shrugged her shoulders. ‘Oh, that was it, eh? was it?’ cried both at once, then they laughed outright.

‘Look how he has done it to-night, just

as she was saying it !' added Mrs. Rochford.
' Poor unfortunate girl !'

Mrs. Carew reflected that it was lucky he was stopped in time, and supposed he was only beginning his excesses. Christy did not enlighten her further ; but next day Matthew, the butler, accounted for the non-appearance of two bottles of wine by the fact of the captain's having gone home, as he expressed it, ' footless.' So her reticence was of no avail.



CHAPTER V.

Ah ! years may come, and years may bring
The truth that is not bliss ;
But will they bring another thing
That can compare with this.'

A. H. CLOUGH.

THE morning of the last day of February broke in a dun red mist, cold and nipping, that promised a sunny bright noon for the football match. Christy's spirits rose as she pulled up the blinds of her windows and recognised the happy presage in the skies without.

When ready to go downstairs she un-

locked a private drawer of hers, and, first counting out a pile of silver, small and large, on the top of the bureau, opened a clasped memorandum-book and began an elaborate calculation of accounts, a process which involved much frowning and puckering of her brows.

At last she gave it up. Presently she snapped to the clasp of the account-book, and dropped it back in the drawer, which she locked. That done, she opened the two windows to their very widest extent, letting in a current of cold raw fog, ran back quickly to the bureau, caught up her money and, with a shiver and a sneeze, rushed out and downstairs.

She was early, and, for a wonder, down before Mrs. Carew. She peeped into the dining-room—no one there. The newspapers were in the fender and a tempting fire blazed cheerfully.

‘Better get the little job over at once,’

she murmured, as she opened the door of Lanty's sanctum on the first lobby.

He was there, seated in his study chair before the ink-stained, hacked and hewed table, a railway-rug wrapped round his knees, and wearing a very cross, cold countenance. He said nothing on seeing her, only fixing her with a stony stare. No whit abashed, she entered, and having shut the door, seated herself at the opposite side of the table.

'I wonder,' she began, in an easy voice, 'how those Almonds got home last night?'

'My responsibility,' observed Lanty, in a freezing tone, 'ended when I committed them to the cabman's custody, and not attaching much value to the precious cargo, I even omitted to take his number. I hope to the Lord they're both at the bottom of the river, or in the canal. If there be any virtue in Portobello Bridge, their joint sum

of iniquity should have sunk it last night going over it.'

Christy burst into a fit of laughing, on which he surveyed her with a grim gravity, and demanded her business.

'Well—' she replied, 'this—that letter of Sugrue's, you know.' He frowned slightly, and looked sharply at her. 'I—er—I read it.'

'You did, did you—begad?' he cried, thoroughly incensed, and standing up he pushed away his chair, let the rug fall down on the floor, and placed his back against the chimney-piece. 'Read a letter not belonging to you, just because you chanced to pick it up! I congratulate you on your principles.'

There was then a lull for a moment, and she hastened to say:

'If you will let me lend you the twenty-five shillings until—you can pay me, if you want it so badly, you know.'

There was an instant's silence. Lanty's red face resumed its normal tint, and he let himself slide back into the chair, his mouth opened with astonishment.

'I do want it,' he said, 'awfully badly. I owe my subscription to the Football Club this long time.'

'Then, there!' she said, and she unclasped her fingers from round the silver and let it drop on the table.

Lanty looked at the pile, and nodded his head with a sort of grunt, significant with him of goodwill.

'I say,' he broke out, suddenly, 'are you going with the missus to-day? Of course you are. Outside car, eh?'

There was a pause.

'Jocelyn's playing,' said Lanty, and as his eyes met his sister's they both sneered. 'Is Dawson going with you?' he asked, with a mischievous grin; then, without giving her time to reply, he seized a massive old book,

and yelling, 'Begone ! fly for your life !' barely gave her time to get outside when he closed the door violently by hurling the aforesaid volume against it.

She was too used to Lanty's ways to pay much attention to these little eccentricities of demeanour, and well satisfied with her morning's work, ran away to make tea.

Nothing was said to her about the expedition to the Park that afternoon, and she thought it as well not to mention the subject. Mrs. Carew's morning temper was seldom reliable. Lunch was ordered half an hour earlier, and Matthew was told to have a car—and to pick out a clean one, with a horse that looked to have the use of his four legs—at the door by half-past two punctually.

'Are you taking the children ?' Christy asked of her step-mother when breakfast was over.

Mrs. Carew had mounted her smart red



morocco slippers on the fender, and was deep in the newspaper. She murmured something unintelligible. Christy was dying to know how the two spare seats were to be filled up, and dreaded in her heart lest Mr. Dawson should have been invited. So filled was she with this terror that she did not venture to repeat her question, lest Mrs. Carew, always sharp enough at such divination, should guess its import.

She ought to have gone to the drawing-room, to superintend the maid at work there, but she ran up first to the nursery. There they had heard nothing of a drive; so she marked Minna's spelling-lesson, gave Elsie her picture-alphabet, and descended to her own tasks.

About twelve Mrs. Carew came in. 'I mean to take Minna, Christy. Would you, as you go to your room, mind telling nurse to dress her nicely?'

‘Minna, eh? and why not the baby? Oh, do! The child frets so when she is left.’

‘Nonsense!’ she said, sharply. ‘I can’t go and turn myself into a nurse. One is enough.’

Minna was the apple of her eye, and was a really handsome, bright child, whereas poor Elsie, who was the ugly duckling of the family, was plain in comparison and backward. An artist would, of the two children, have preferred her head and face for a study. Her wide pale blue eyes were wistful and sweet in expression, the tiny upturned nose and little round soft face were attractive and piquant, and the hair, of an undecided pale blonde colour, turned in and out in quaint little drake’s-tail curls on her neck. She was shy and sensitive and very unlucky, ‘put upon’ by the nurse, by Minna, and by her mamma, whom she

worshipped as something grand and beautiful and far-off, that was always associated with perfume, rustling silk, and bright gleaming things.

Christy thought compassionately of the dull back room that was the nursery, and the neglected Elsie weeping uncomplainingly all day there.

‘She deserves to be brought, then,’ she said. ‘Last night, Miss Minna was down as usual in her night-dress, plundering, and the other one never stirred. It’s not fair—and,’ she added, seeing a symptom of relenting on her step-mother’s face, ‘I’ll have her on my side of the car.’

Whereupon Mrs. Carew told her, ungraciously, she might do as she liked; an announcement which Christy hailed as an earnest that her tormentor had not been invited to come with their party. Perhaps he had not heard of it at all; that, however, was scarcely likely, as Lanty had

been for some time back suffering from acute foot-ball on the brain.

They started at a quarter to three, the children dressed in their best, and in wild spirits. Minna had a hussar cap of fur, with a hanging red tassel, which flew about, as did her long crimped hair, as she tossed her head rather after the manner of a little Shetland pony. She had red stockings, and a very short red dress showed under her smart fur-edged coat. Altogether, she was showy to her own heart's content, and what her attire lacked her exertions supplied.

Elsie was dressed exactly like her sister, but looked merely a little fat contented bundle, as she sat beside her big step-sister, her feet stuck straight out over the edge of the seat, holding fast to the rail like a little Englishwoman, as Christy told her.

‘Isn’t that Mrs. Rochford’s carriage coming up behind?’

Christie called her step-mother’s atten-

tion to a pair of tall bays fast approaching.

Mrs. Carew turned her head sharply.

‘They should go by the quays. Could Harriet have called in the Square for us? Perhaps the Armstrongs and Miss Rochford have not gone after all. No, no, it’s not her carriage; don’t you see?’

She was disappointed, for if it had been Mrs. Rochford, with three seats at her disposal, she would have at once dismissed her car and joyfully hoisted herself into the landau.

The Mansion House brougham passed them. The two wigged servants touched their hats to Miss Carew, who, on catching sight of some flame-coloured object in the window, shrugged her shoulders.

‘I wonder where they mean to take up their position. I will not have myself drawn into their set. Do you hear me, Christina? That carriage will be the

rallying-point for every grocer in Dublin, particularly as it has that firework of a bonnet inside it.'

'Yes, perfectly; but I think you will allow that they are not very pertinacious in seeking your company.'

This speech conveyed an innuendo which the little lady appreciated in silence. A ball was to be held the following week at the Mansion House, to which the Carew party had not been invited.

They were not long, once arrived in the Park, in taking up their position at the great elms where the match was to be played. The Mansion House carriage had been some time established, and was nearly hidden from view by some big city carriages—'car'ges—of the most unmistakable class, with green linings and brass-plated harness. The liveries of the retainers were also invariably of that cheerful tint.

There were a great many waggonettes, and Mrs. Carew made spiteful remarks concerning waggonettes. She held that certain people (that very class who have the most right of all to ride in carriages, they having incontestably earned them), on discovering that they preferred riding to walking. invariably selected waggonettes, because of the closer resemblance of that conveyance, above all others, to another vehicle of more general utility, to which the steed was better used.

Mrs. Carew, ruling her movements according to her surroundings, made her Jehu change his position very often. She had various objects in view; one, and the principal, was to get somewhere near the Rochford carriage—not beside it—for her temper would never have borne the contrast between her equipage and her sister's. Besides, if Miss Rochford had accompanied her sister-in-law, Mrs. Carew felt that too close a vicinage would not be desirable.

She wished also to keep a civil distance from the civic contingent. The O'Kelly of Timahoo was sure to turn up there, or some priests, and she did not want to be stamped as an *épicière* at once. Then, for another reason—not as weighty, to do her justice, as either of these—she wanted to be in a good position, where she could see and be seen by Neville Jocelyn, who, as one of the—th Lancers, belonged to this club.

Christy wondered what could be the reason for her fidgetiness ; however she was too busy with her own affairs to give the little lady's movements the attention she would have otherwise done. A tawny red beard and a brown Chesterfield coat haunted her imagination, and her eyes wandered round and round, expecting the unwelcome vision to break upon them momentarily from behind the trunks of the elms, all yellow in the wintry sunlight, or from among the carriages that were drawn up in line beside them.

Among these Mrs. Carew soon espied Mrs. Rochford's. She got down, and, taking Minna with her, walked over to speak to her sister. There was an empty seat in the carriage; as she suspected, Mrs. Armstrong had not accompanied the party—her niece alone was in front. Mrs. Rochford and her sister-in-law, an uncivil old woman, occupied the back seat.

When Mrs. Carew saw the one vacant seat she wished she had left Minna behind on the car. She thought she would like to take possession of it, and her cherished daughter was now an obstruction. The grass was damp and soft; the sun, as is usual after frost, had made it rather wet than dry, and the horse's feet and the wheels had ploughed it unpleasantly.

‘How do you do, Harriet?’ she said, suddenly appearing at the side of the landau.

Mrs. Rochford replied to this greeting,

inwardly wishing her sister had remained with her own conveyance. Miss Rochford like her did not agree with her for two reasons—firstly, because of herself and her flirting ways, which the maiden lady somewhat unjustly termed fast; and secondly, because she had ‘gone over to Rome.’ Like the true Irish Evangelical, of whom she was a typical representative, Miss Rochford hated Papistry. She dismissed every Roman Catholic servant in her employment, immediately that the Act ’68 was carried, and had never since reinstated one of them. Like her brother, she had favoured Home Rule in its infancy; but when the infant waxed strong, and kicked itself into the ragged breeches of Papist Liberalism, she withdrew herself at once from the contamination.

She had not forgiven her brother’s marriage. That event had taken place during, and people said owing to, a long illness

which had incapacitated her from fulfilling her usual task of surveillance. However, that did not prevent her being very fond of her sister-in-law, whose persistent good-humour and civil attentions had at last mollified her.

The cream and grapes and garden-stuff from Rochfordstown, and carriage rides, had no doubt something to do with the consideration in which she held her brother's wife ; just as they may have had something to do with Mrs. Carew's detestation of herself. Mrs. Carew thought she had a far better right to the hampers from Rochfordstown, and to the back seat of the carriage, when her brother-in-law's invaluable steeds were in town. And now, as she stood beside their carriage in the wet grass, she greeted the old lady, who was seated in what she thought ought to be her place, with a countenance to the full as unwelcoming and as wintry as that which met

her. Mrs. Rochford, in her turn, held Mrs. Carew's *quignon* against her sister-in-law to be as unfounded as it was impolitic. She sent presents from Rochfords town to Mountjoy Square in what she considered to be fair proportion.

‘The carriage was hers, Caroline, before it was mine,’ she used to answer when remonstrated with as to that bone of contention—the back seat; and Caroline, who had by fits notions of equity and fair dealing, used to assent, as if she acknowledged all the justice of that remark. Nevertheless, when she was on foot in Grafton Street, and saw the carriage at Forrests’ door, or Brown and Thomas’s, with Miss Rochford within, ensconced in the fur rugs, she would rebel again.

‘How d’ye do, Miss Rochford?’ she now said, barely touching the fur-lined glove, over which was drawn a knitted mitten, that was extended to her. Minna had

seen Miss Rochford but once before, and as was natural between such a pair, they had taken a rooted dislike, to each other, she hung in her mother's hand, fidgeting and kicking with her feet.

'You had better get in, Caroline,' said her sister, in a severe tone. 'You ought not to be on the wet grass. Minna, come you over to me.' Mrs. Rochford could see no faults in her nieces, and spoilt them frightfully. 'Amy,' she said to Miss Armstrong, 'you won't mind the child, will you?'

'Oh no!' said Mrs. Carew, who was spreading herself in her seat; 'Amy won't, I am sure.'

This was said at her enemy, who by her manner of shaking her skirts expressed her sense of inconvenience and disapprobation. Mrs. Rochford prepared herself for an unpleasant quarter of an hour, and determined moreover to let Caroline have the old lady's

disagreeableness to cope with unsupported. She had no business coming there. Amy Armstrong would be wanting that seat for one of her young men ; and she knew very well that it was not sisterly affection that had prompted the visit, but the desire to display herself in the Rochford equipage.

‘Let her get a carriage for herself,’ she reflected, and pouted her under-lip in a way that Mrs. Carew knew of old, and which determined the duration of her visit.

Meantime Christy had discovered Lanty among the players ; his long, slim figure looked taller than before in the white flannel suit, and he was dashing to and fro, giving and receiving kicks with the greatest excitement. The best and most skilled men were of course the ‘quarter-backs’ and ‘half-backs.’ Jocelyn was a half-back, and was posted at the other side of the ground, watching his opportunity to run into the dangerous, excited throng, and bear off

the ball to his own goal. Westerton was also playing. He was a big, powerfully-built young man, and the crack player of the college team.

Elsie could not in the least understand it; but she stood upon the seat of the car and echoed all Christy's exclamations. Presently the college made a goal, and a rest of ten minutes was declared. Westerton, who had seen Miss Carew, came up to speak to her; with him came a college friend, who had long wanted to be introduced to her. She was in full swing of conversation when, looking up suddenly, her eyes fell on the long-expected figure of Mr. Dawson, walking in her direction. She mentally wished him in his native Birmingham, and prepared herself for a good hour's boredom; but, to her surprise, he contented himself with making her his most elaborate bow, sweeping his hat off very quickly and dropping it down very low and very

slowly, showing his bald round head, like a gleaming disc of polished white metal against the grey-green of the elm-trunks.

Miss Carew's heart beat high with delight as he presented the back of his perfectly-fitting brown coat ; and she drew in her own mind an unkind contrast between Mr. Dawson's hirsute deficiencies and Westerton's short crop of crisp wet curls. Mr. Dawson went to a distance and surveyed her from behind a sheltered corner, whence, indeed, he had been watching her for a long time before making the descent which had been so fruitless. He knew his own value far too well to make himself cheap ; and he began even to ask himself whether he had not been a little too precipitate—of course, from the point of view of his own dignity—in his attentions to the young lady. Not that he was in the least doubtful of his ultimate success ; that never entered his brain for an instant.

He had no intention of measuring himself against that pair of football players who were talking so devotedly to her. How bright and pretty she looked at that instant ! The game was recommencing, and one of them was running across the field to his party, who were hallooing and whistling to the tall fellow, who lingered still, though he had turned to go. She was shaking her head and smiling. He was not at all displeased that she should receive attention and admiration ; rather the contrary ; it did credit to his choice. He noticed, too, that she seemed kind and gentle to her little step-sister, and he thought that, too, a good sign of her. Altogether, as he smoked his cigar under the trees, he felt more and more convinced that 'it was a suitable article.'

Meanwhile Christy was following the match with unflinching interest, watching the fortune of the ball as the black and

yellow stripes seemed to carry it nearly up to the goal, only to have it tossed high in air by a daring quarter-back and sped to the opposite end of the field. So intent was she that she did not hear her own name pronounced gently close at her side. Elsie did though, and a cry from her made Christy turn. There were Mrs. Almond and her husband.

‘How do you do?’ they asked simultaneously. ‘Where is Caroline?’

‘With Mrs. Rochford, I think. How did you come?’

‘Tram,’ replied Mrs. Almond, with a grimace; ‘and I have been standing in this wet grass until I feel quite chilled.’

She looked cold and tired. Christy invited them to avail themselves of the empty seats on the car, which they did with alacrity.

‘My cigarette doesn’t annoy you, I hope?’ asked the captain.

He looked a little sheepish, and, remembering his performances of the previous night, rather avoided meeting her eye.

‘Oh no, no!’ she answered, wondering to herself what he would do if she were to say yes.

Mrs. Almond’s manner betrayed no consciousness whatsoever of her share in the doings of the previous evening. There were the same levity and easiness, or rather free-and-easiness of style. Minna once upon a time said, ‘Aunt Susan is always looking about her:’ and that remark, in truth, somehow seemed to describe Mrs. Almond very accurately. She saw everything within a radius of half a mile, at the very least: every bonnet, every dress, every flirtation, and she had all the gossip at her fingers’ ends.

Christy wished she had got on the side with her husband, and not on hers, and de-

terminated, if she began to tease her, that she would put a stop to it at once. It was not long before Mrs. Almond gave her an opportunity of being saucy. She had not failed to see Mr. Dawson patrolling about, and her curiosity was excited by the fact of his not being in attendance on Christy. She digested her snub—a pretty severe one, for Christy was not one to do things by halves—in silence for a moment, then turned round, and said humbly :

‘ I did not mean to vex you, really I did not. Chris, don’t be so cross to me !’

She looked penitent, being really frightened by the young lady’s unexpected sturdiness. Christy noticed that her eyelids were slightly red, and that there were dark circles all round them, as if she had not slept all night. She felt sorry for her, and after saying that she did not like to be chaffed, and especially if it were for nothing, relapsed into her usual easy manner.

While Westerton and his friend Longleats were amusing themselves and Miss Carew, a curious scene was being enacted farther down the line. Jocelyn, between whom and Miss Armstrong there was a sort of understanding as to this meeting, suddenly presented himself at the side of the carriage next Mrs. Carew. She, knowing nothing of their arrangement, immediately and characteristically assumed that he had seen her from afar, and that of course she herself was the attraction; and reckless of Miss Rochford's disapproving, contemptuous frown, and of Miss Armstrong's ill-concealed pout, began a flirtation under their eyes.

Jocelyn, in truth, did not care which lady it was. He had almost forgotten his promise to Miss Armstrong—a promise made between the rounds of a valse the night before; but she had caught his eye as he was skirting by their carriage, on his

way to where the wigged heads of the lord mayor's footmen proclaimed Esther O'Neil's whereabouts, and he recollected himself, and felt bound to go and say something civil to the girl. To his astonishment, he found himself face to face with Mrs. Carew. He had too much presence of mind to look confused, so he squeezed her fingers meaningly, and throwing at the same time a glance, charged with infinite sorrow and pain, to the young lady, he leaned the elbows of the Ulster he had wrapped himself in on the door, and began a general conversation.

Mrs. Carew did her best to make it particular. She could not help her nature; she knew she was making her neighbour spiteful, and that Miss Rochford took the girl's part against her, and sneered at her besides. The Armstrongs were people whom it was impolitic to offend; and her sister wished her strongly to cultivate Miss

Rochford's goodwill. But no, not one of these considerations could weigh with her when it was a question of displaying a conquest, or a fancied conquest. Mrs. Rochford saw it all, and was more amused than angry. Presently a halloo made itself heard. Jocelyn turned, glad enough to go.

‘Mrs. Rochford—er—you can’t give me a seat back to town?’

He glanced at Miss Armstrong as he spoke, and her face lighted up at once at the prospect, as perceptibly as Mrs. Carew’s darkened. Mrs. Rochford made haste to answer.

‘Yes, certainly I can, Mr. Jocelyn!’

He lifted his round cap with a grateful nod and smile, and ran across to his post, pulling off his Ulster as he did so.

‘Is he not handsome?’ exclaimed Mrs. Rochford, warmly. ‘Such an elegant-looking figure of a man! and his features are so aristocratic!’

‘Conceited, my dear Harriet,’ said Miss Rochford. Then she added, in a pointed tone, ‘I must say it is no wonder.’

‘We shall have to wait till the match is over for him,’ said Miss Armstrong, in a tone of affected complaining.

‘Shall you mind that?’ asked the old lady, in a vinegary tone. ‘When I was young I should not have minded waiting for a beau so handsome and so sought after. Things are different now. I don’t understand the young women of the present day, I confess.’

She buried her chin as she said this in her sable tippet, and looked at her *vis-à-vis* with a sort of curdled smile.

Mrs. Carew thought she had had enough of the carriage and its company, and alleging some misconduct of Minna’s as an excuse, got out, and went back to her own despised conveyance. She was not in too pleasant a humour, and dragged Minna

along through the muddy grass, promising her a whipping when she got home as the reward of her naughtiness—a promise which that young lady would have been justified by experience in giving heavy odds against ever being fulfilled. She was a little shortsighted, and at first could not make out who the people were on her car with Christy. As she drew nearer, she soon descried Mrs. Almond's sealskin turban, and a little emotion of natural indignation at their impudence took possession of her. Mrs. Almond perhaps saw something of this, for she jumped down, and, giving her worse half a warning push that made him at once follow her example, advanced to meet her sister.

‘Caroline,’ she said, when they had exchanged a kind of peck by way of sisterly salutation, ‘I was so done up, standing in the wet, that I helped myself to a seat on your car.’

‘Oh, all right,’ replied she, mollified at once by this submission. ‘Get up again now, I want to talk to you. Well, Wentworth, and how do you do to-day?’

There was that in the tone with which ‘to-day’ was said that made Wentworth resolve to be off at once. He helped his wife and Mrs. Carew back into their seats, and then moved as if to go. Christy had made room for one of the visitors on her side.

‘What, Wentworth!’ cried his wife, with an anxious look, ‘where are you going, dear?’

She moved as if to get down and accompany him; her face took the watchful, nervous expression it almost always wore in his absence. He came a little closer to her.

‘Sue, I—I give you my soul!’ he muttered, in a thick, indistinct whisper. ‘I’m only going round to the goal. Look!

you can see me all the way. You needn't be afraid.'

She nodded, with a sort of helpless look, and he went off.

'The usual thing, Susan, is it? And now you'll be wretched until he comes back!'

Mrs. Carew spoke sympathetically, for though she quarrelled most with Mrs. Almond, she was her favourite sister. Mrs. Almond sighed and shrugged her shoulders.

'I don't mind so much when I am with him; but now, if he were to meet anybody he knew, there is the chance he would go off; and Heaven knows if I should see him again for three days, perhaps! Very likely he will do what he says, and come back all right; but there is the chance of the other thing, and——'

She stopped, and bit her under-lip, which was quivering fast; her eyes were clouded with tears, and the brows arched into a pathetic curve.

‘Try and don’t think of such awful things. I would not let my mind run on them.’

‘Ah, Caroline! you never had *it* to deal with. Think of what I’ve gone through; it is easy to say, “Make up your mind to it.” My dear girl, there are things that you never do, or care to make up your mind to. It is not that they get worse as you go on, but you get hopeless, and one’s nerves get worse. I never closed an eye last night; and then, when he goes down to the club, I never feel easy for a minute. I know, as soon as I catch sight of the top of his hat even over the hedge at the corner of our road, how it is with him. If it is dark I know by his way of ringing the bell; and I just sit and sew and think of this sort of thing. Oh dear!’

‘Oh dear!’ echoed Mrs. Carew. ‘I wouldn’t put up with it, I would leave him. I have told you, years ago, you have a home with me, Susan.’

‘He would kill himself in a month, and then I should never forgive myself; and you know, Caroline, Wentworth is fond of me: he clings to me, he has no one but me; he is a friendless poor stray creature, and he has no one to turn to were I to leave him. No,’ she went on emphatically; ‘I must say that of Wentworth, with all his faults, he has been a faithful husband to me.’

‘That’s something,’ observed Mrs. Carew drily; then she said to herself, ‘It is just what Edward says, she is wrapped up in Almond, and, ha! ha! thinks he is wrapped up in her. Even as a child, I can recollect Susan was vain. Bless us! who would believe, after all, the comfort our failings—our very worst failings—often turn out to be! Here is this poor girl—if she had not that flattering unction to lay to her soul, what would life, what could life, be to her?’

Mrs. Carew was rather struck with these

reflections of hers, and preached quite a homily to herself on their text. She even thought of writing them down in a certain private scrap-book of her own, that was kept carefully under lock and key, and in which were those selections from the poets which she used for quotations, but which she had never yet had time to learn quite off by heart.

Christy, on her side of the car, was not so engrossed by the game and by the care of her step-sisters that she could not hear what was being said; she felt sorry for Mrs. Almond, but at the same time she thought of a day that she and Esther O'Neil were in Mitchell's giving orders, and that she saw Mrs. Almond eating an ice with some handsome military-looking man, and of how red she got when she saw her come in. She was an incomprehensible person to her, and so was that 'stray creature,' her husband, who was not

above borrowing half-crowns from Lanty ; and she put both of them out of her head.

Lanty, who, in playing *paya de sa personne* most inordinately, soon after received a terrible kick, and had to be helped off the ground.

Jocelyn gave him his arm, and they steered their way to a big tree, behind which the wounded shin was wrapped in a strip of handkerchief.

‘I’m done, I expect,’ said Lanty, who was very pale ; ‘you go back though. I’ll make my way over there to that brougham ; they said they’d drive me home.’

‘Eh !’ said Jocelyn, quickly ; ‘I’ll help you across.’

Then he ran his arm at once through Lanty’s, and helped him up. They skirted round a thicket of trees, and reached the brougham from behind, unseen by most of the spectators.

There was an outcry on Lanty’s pre-

sending himself, and the O'Kelly of Timahoo, who had inserted his stalwart personage into the brougham, and was complacently basking in the front seat, was unceremoniously bundled out, and the wounded hero installed in his place.

To Lanty's astonishment Jocelyn seemed in no hurry to return to his place in the game. He dexterously shot himself before the O'Kelly, and placed himself at the one open window of the brougham, which, too, chanced to be the one beside which Miss O'Neil was seated.

The Timahoo chieftain, who had been dispossessed, glared at Jocelyn's back as if he meditated a violent revenge on the spot; then he dashed round to the other side, and presented himself there. The window was shut, and, for obvious reasons, could only be opened from the inside.

Miss Grace Callan, who was only too happy to have exchanged him for Lanty,

let down the glass a half-inch, and said, in the mildest and smallest of voices :

‘ Did you want anything, Mr. O’Kelly ?’

‘ As if I was some beggar man !’ the irate chieftain afterwards remarked.

He made the whole brougham a low salaam, and marched off indignantly. Lanty and Miss Grace laughed at his discomfiture, she the more heartily of the two ; for Lanty, on arriving, had hoped that O’Kelly would have stayed to entertain Miss Callan, and that he would have had Esther to himself. And now, to his disappointment, Jocelyn had established himself, and evidently had no intention of withdrawing. Lanty felt aggrieved and indignant. He stole a long look at Esther. She had one hand resting on the window beside Jocelyn’s elbow, and her eyes upturned to his as if fascinated. He had leaned his cheek on his hand, and spoke to her in a low tone inaudible to the others.

Her face was in the light, and the pale rays of the fast-waning sun seemed to fasten and linger lovingly on her hair, which caught and held them with strangely beautiful lights. Her clear, pallid skin seemed illumined, as if from within. She was unconscious of everything, of everybody, but Nevil's presence, and he was to the full as absorbed in hers.

Lanty said some naughty words to himself, and seeing the hopelessness of affairs, turned his attention to the agreeable Miss Callan, who had long avowed herself to be dying about him. She was a well-grown girl of eighteen, of Galway extraction, as evidenced by her accent and her blue eyes and black eyelashes, brows and hair. Her nose was nondescript, her mouth neither small nor large, and of no particular shape, but exceedingly and comically expressive. It seemed to play an abnormally large part in the articulation of her words, and when

she was silent — a rare occurrence — it seemed as if she compressed her lips into an unnaturally small compass, and kept them so by a distinct act of her will.

‘Well, Miss Callan,’ he began, ‘how has the world been treating you since we met last? and have you seen anybody you liked better than yourself in all that time?’

‘No, indeed, Mr. Carew,’ she returned, in her rich Galway brogue; ‘and now that I see you, I don’t find myself any better off.’

‘Don’t fib, Graceless—don’t fib! When did you see Father Caffrey last? I’m going to confession next week. Tell me, now, how many yards of penances have you got? The canon is a stiff customer, is he not?’

‘Is it him? Not one bit of him. He is just like a door.’

‘A door!’ repeated Lanty. ‘How is he like a door?’

‘Why, you go in and you come out, and he says nothing at all.’

Lanty roared.

‘That is a good one, Graceless. I never heard the beat of you yet. I don’t like the canon as a confessor myself; in fact’—and Mr. Carew assumed a dignified tone—‘he insulted me the only time I ever confessed to him.’

‘Insulted you!’ repeated Miss Callan; ‘oh, Mr. Carew!’

‘Yes. I told him everything I had done, and he listened without saying a syllable till I had finished; then he said: “Well, my good boy, and I suppose you rob your employer?” Just think of it! I explained that I had no employer, etc. Then he gave me absolution as if he considered it thrown away upon me. Ah, the whole thing is a humbug! Now, tell the truth, Graceless, isn’t it?’

Graceless screamed with horror, being

quite as shocked at this speech as its perpetrator intended her to be. Lanty was a little bitten with Mr. Dawson's craze for posing as a superior intelligence far removed above common prejudices and beliefs. He considered, like many boys of his age, and indeed like some of a larger growth too, that it was fine and looked clever to profess these unbelieving principles. It gave him at very little expense the air of knowing a great deal. Miss Grace opened her round eyes as wide as they would go, pretending to be shocked. She was rather too well used to this sort of exhibitions not to know how to deal with them. For that matter the O'Kelly of Timahoo had just been slandering the Blessed Mother and Queen Elizabeth simultaneously, in a certain reckless, abandoned manner peculiar to eligible young gentlemen on the outlook for rescuing female saviours with so many thousands down.

Graceless dropped her eyelids, and folding up her mouth into the most demure and proper pout she could manage, sat perfectly still and dignified. Lanty looked at her for an instant, then he leaned forward, and, seizing one of her hands, whispered in impassioned accents :

‘Grace, you’re a darling creature !’

‘Go ’long, Mr. Carew !’ cries Miss Grace, half frightened, wholly delighted ; and then she giggled so loudly that Esther turned round and looked in a surprised manner at her and the audacious Mr. Carew.

However, they both assumed a most demure air, and when she turned away again recommenced with redoubled vigour, a vigour, indeed, far surpassing—thousand-fold excelling—that of the conversation by the window.

Still waters run deepest, and by the babbling, running brook this was a fathom-

less mere. They neither talked nor laughed. To Jocelyn it was enough that he was with her, and to Esther it seemed a transfigured world, since he had come to the carriage-door. They spoke not, and yet it seemed as if they had exchanged volumes, more eloquent, more meaning, passionate and vehement, than ever Lanty and Miss Graceless or a thousand couples, with their sham glances and sham hand-pressures, and the rest of it, could compass in a thousand years. Neither of them knew how this had come about. Jocelyn recollected indistinctly an August evening, between day, grey light and night, that he had just heard of her, barely seen her; a September day that he had stood beside her on the high white road of Newtown Mountkelly watching the flickering shadows of the beech-trees, as they danced over her fair brow and gold-lit hair. The night of the first drawing-room of the season seemed to come

back to him with its brilliant panorama of scarlet and gold, the mingled perfumes, the clang and music of the band, and the countless hues of the ladies' dresses coming and going, a perturbed sea of broken colour ; tossing white plumes and frothy lace for foam, and jewels iridescent, like the night tints of the waves. One white form floated Nereid-like above it all, to his eyes one soft childlike face, with shy wondering blue eyes, held its place persistently in the kaleidoscope medley, that melted from his memory like wax before a hot fire now that he was with her. To-day, so far from being able to say these things to her, he was more silent than ever. At last he was forced to go ; the band was playing ' God save the Queen ; ' the sun had sunk into great waves of smoky red mist, that rolled behind the elm-trees like some far-off fire, turning darker and darker by degrees, until a thin

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gibbous moon with sharp horns, that was riding clear and high above the black network of the trees, took a yellow tinge.

The chatter beside her went on unceasingly all the time they were driving homewards. Lanty, though his shin was stinging him painfully, and he was vexed that Esther seemed so absorbed in Jocelyn, kept up, nevertheless, an unbroken flow of chatter with the willing Grace, who, having taken note with her great round eyes of the devotion of Mr. Jocelyn, was not a whit ill-pleased to be able to show that she, too, had a cavalier all her own ; not an officer, certainly, but a Trinity College young gentleman, which was perhaps the next best thing in point of naughtiness and delightfulness.

Lanty tried vainly to make Esther talk ; it was no use ; she lay back in the carriage, leaning her head against the cushion at the side. Now and again she looked at him,

and in the half-dark he could see that she was smiling, whether at his sayings or her own thoughts who could tell ? Graceless's firework bonnet flashed to and fro as she leaned backwards and forwards, and her Galway brogue intensified as the conversation became more *bruyant*. The horses' hoofs left the dry hard road and fell softer in the city mud. The gas-lamps were lighting one by one, and had these young people chosen to look upward, they might have seen tiny white lamps hanging against the sky's wide curtain ; but they were all otherwise engaged.

Lanty was suffering from his wound, and suffering in another way too—one to which he was not so well accustomed. Esther had treated him like a little child : she did not care a button about him ; she smiled, and looked, and spoke to Jocelyn only ; and now he meant to let her see how little it troubled him.

Graceless, delighted with her conquest, invited him to call and see her some day not far off in Rathmines. He never even listened to the address. He was watching Esther so intently now, for as they passed a lamp-post at the corner of the Square, he saw, or thought he saw, a tear roll down her face.

‘Could I have been mistaken?’ thought Lanty, when, after squeezing Miss Callan’s hand with such loving fervour as to split her very tight-fitting glove all up the back, he held Esther’s long, slender fingers in his own, and noted the bright, sweet smile on her face as she bid him good-bye. ‘Women are so queer!’ thought this philosopher, while waiting for the hall-door to open, as he watched the carriage disappearing in the twilight; ‘a man never knows what they’re up to.’



CHAPTER VI.

‘*Cash.* I pray thee, good Cob, what makes thee so out of love with fasting days?

‘*Cob.* Marry, that which will make any man out of love with them, I think—their bad conditions an’ you will needs know. First, they are of a Flemish breed—I am sure on it, for they raven up more butter than all the days of the week beside; next, they stink of fish and leek porridge miserably; thirdly, they keep a man devoutly hungry all day, and at night send him supperless to bed.’

Every Man in his Humour.

THE Lent, that time of east wind, abstinence, and religious observances, had set in early, and fish dinners and sour tempers, their never-

failing concomitants, held their undivided sway over the faithful.

Mrs. Carew was a strict observer; and looked well to the ways of her household: there was no eluding fast or abstinence, no forgetting quarter-tense week, with its dreary fish-smelling Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. She knew the rubric by heart, and on black fast days cut off egg-sauce and butter and milk from the dietary with the zeal and unfeelingness of a Torquemada. She began on Ash-Wednesday, in spite of her husband's protests, with the prescribed Lenten diet, two ounces of dry bread, and tea *à la Russe*, and looked horrified at Christina, who ate marmalade instead of butter, and took all the good out of her unpalatable black tea by grumbling at it. Lanty, who was supposed to be delicate, was permitted white meats—butter and milk—for his breakfast; and so was the crown solicitor,

who exempted himself on the plea that he was over age, as Christina was under it.

‘Give me the bread, Lanty,’ said Christina, ‘and that marmalade, if you’ve not eaten it all. It is funny, but I feel so hungry this morning—just the day, too, that an appetite is so little use to one!’

‘I must say, jam and marmalade are curious mortifications!’ observed Mrs. Carew, in an acid tone; ‘and I am quite certain the regulations never intended any such substitutes for butter.’

‘Very little consequence what they intended, to my mind,’ said the crown solicitor from the other side of his paper, ‘if we do what they told us to. You will most assuredly be ill, if you go on like that, Caroline! Why is there no brown bread on the table?’

‘Ill,’ echoed Lanty, who, on account of finding no meat for breakfast, was in a rather captious humour—‘the best thing

that could happen to her. Why? Then she would have the crown of martyrdom, and be forced to eat meat three times a day at least. Is that a foreshadowing of the crown of martyrdom that I perceive, ma'am, just above your nose?' he asked, impertinently bending forward and scrutinising what appeared to be a large-sized smudge on his step-mother's forehead, but what was in reality the mark of the 'blessed ashes,' which she had been to receive at eight o'clock mass that morning.

'Mr. Carew!' cried the little lady, 'if it is by your wish that this pagan ribaldry is indulged in, I suppose I must bear it in pa——'

'Lanty!' almost shouted his father, whose leading article had been interrupted, 'finish your breakfast and begone out of my sight without another word; and you, miss,' to Christy, 'you are encouraging

him as usual. You are a pretty example, indeed, to your family.'

'I am *not* encouraging him,' returned Christy. 'I have not said a word of the sort,' and she assumed an injured air.

'My dear girl,' Mr. Carew was saying to his wife, 'how can you be so foolish! I wonder at you, now, I do indeed. It all comes of your insisting on having your own way, and going off to eight o'clock mass this cold morning. You'll end by being laid up. Now, now.' It sounded as if an infant was being soothed.

'Don't be silly, Edward!' snapped she, half mollified.

Presently the crown solicitor withdrew to his study. Mrs. Carew hastily picked up the paper, and read the deaths, marriages and births.

'No mention of Colonel Armstrong's death—of course not, as he is a Protestant,' she observed. 'It is ridiculous to be sure,

but a fact ; if one has a mixed circle of acquaintance, one would need to take a Protestant paper as well as a Catholic, to know what was become of them.'

'If you mean the dead ones,' observed Christy, 'it doesn't much matter, does it?'

'Christina,' said her step-mother severely, 'I should be very glad indeed if you would try and leave off that quick, pert mode of talking. It is unbecoming at your age.' Then she followed her husband to his study.

Lanty and Christy simultaneously made a rush for the paper and the arm-chair by the fire. Christy secured the paper, but he plumped himself into the chair.

'None of your "pagan ribaldry," sir. Let me have that chair, and you shall have half the paper.'

'None of your "pert unbecomingness," miss,' returned he. 'Let's have it, Chris.

I only want to see it for an instant. I have to go directly, you know.'

She gave him the paper, and strolled over to the window to look out. It was sunny, with the bright cold sun of the first days of March. The roadway was white and shining, and, in the Square beyond, the trees had that black nipped look of desolation and suffering that east wind, even more than the coldest frost and snow, can give. There was an earthenware porcupine on the window-sill, and the yellow and purple buds of the crocuses were beginning to come out through it. Now and again a swift breeze of wind went by, gathering up the dust and flinging it with a sharp petulant slap against the window-panes.

'Lanty, I say,' began Christy, after she had completed her survey.

Lanty returned no answer.

'I say, Lanty !' she repeated.

‘Say it, then!’ he ejaculated, laying down the paper with a startling suddenness.

‘Goodness gracious! some one has to read that paper after you. I just wanted merely to know when you saw Jocelyn last.’

‘I? Wasn’t he here the other day?’

‘Oh yes, I know; and *she* has been buying that last new poem of Browning’s—ahem! I only meant had you seen him anywhere—further down town?’

‘No, then, I haven’t,’ Lanty said thoughtfully. Presently the possible drift of her question occurred to him, and he flushed up and frowned.

‘No—humph! I will say this too. Jocelyn knows right well he has no business humbugging that girl. It’s a beastly shame, I say!’

He was standing now with his back to the mantelpiece, and his hands in his pockets; he looked quite excited.

‘Well, but,’ interpolated Christy, who

had slipped into the easy-chair, and was mounting her feet on the fender comfortably, 'what if he should not be humbugging at all, eh?—what if he should be serious?'

Lanty stared down at her.

'You are a fool!' he observed. 'Do you imagine that old bigoted ass of an O'Neil will ever let her marry any one but an R.C.? Why, you know, Dawson was going in for her, and got a hint in time that it would be of no use.'

'Ah, yes! and so retired in time to save his dignity and economise his valuable feelings.'

Then she laughed maliciously at the idea of this Cœlebs in search of a wife calmly transferring his unmarketable attentions to herself. She seemed, indeed, to find something excessively amusing in the image, conjured up in her mind, for she held the newspaper up as a screen between herself

and Lanty, and indulged in a prolonged silent cachinnation behind the shelter.

‘What are you weeping for, there?’ said her brother at last, pulling down the paper. ‘Stop it, Christy! When are you going to see Esther?’

‘I don’t know. Somehow, latterly, we have not seen so much of each other. I have half a mind to go to ten o’clock mass. I ought, else I shall have Mrs. C.s’ smutted forehead, like a warning and a beacon, before me all day. I will go, and take Minna too. Philomena Dunne is sure to be there, and I’ll learn from her what is up at the Mansion House.’

No sooner said than done. She pushed back her chair, and ran off upstairs to get ready. The nurse refused to dress Miss Minna without direct authority from her mamma, and Christina was forced to go downstairs again to obtain it. When she reached the drawing-room floor she stopped,

and surveying the broad polished rail of the balustrade, suddenly determined to treat herself to an amusement she much affected. The children were out of sight, nobody looking. Where was the harm? So she thought as she deliberately mounted the rail, gave herself the needful impetus, and launched forth on her adventurous journey. She steered round the elbow of the stairs without dismounting, and gathering velocity as she went, arrived on the door-mat at the foot of the flight unfortunately a couple of seconds late. Mrs. Carew opened the study-door, which was exactly opposite, and, with her father, was in time to witness the close of the madcap feat.

‘Well, *Miss Carew*!’ she ejaculated, and turned with a look to the crown solicitor—a look that plainly said, ‘Does not this confirm what I told you?’

Christina drew herself up with a ‘do your worst’ expression of countenance.

The crown solicitor said nothing. He tried to look grim, but suddenly broke into a laugh, and abruptly saved the situation by shutting the door of his study.

‘I was in a hurry, that’s all,’ said Miss Carew. ‘Can I take Minna to mass, or not?’ she asked, quickly.

‘Yes.’ Then, with a bewildered air, ‘Stay, where are the keys? Oh! I have them in my pocket. Put on her warm coat!’ she cried after her step-daughter, who was already far up the stairs.

The chapel was pretty full. The crowd, as is usual on a holiday that is not recognised by the state, was composed chiefly of women. Here and there, but at rare intervals, appeared some pious elder, retired from business, and making atonement for wealth acquired too easily and expeditiously. The high altar was all swathed in purple, and the vestments of the officiating priest were of the same hue.

Christy singled out Philomena's small person among the throng of the faithful, who, having eaten pancakes the night before, now presented themselves to have their foreheads touched with coal-ashes, and to be reminded of their origin and end. Minna, who had got the ring in the pancakes the previous evening, could with difficulty be kept decently quiet during mass. The ceremony ended, Christy took up her place at the door, and waited for Miss Dunne, who was nearly the last to leave the church. At last her demure figure appeared. She carried a large prayer-book in her hand, well interleaved with mortuary-cards, religious pictures, and ribbon-markers with pious medallions at their ends. Philomena's countenance wore a doleful look, and her round drab-eyes showed traces of recent tears. She responded to Miss Carew's greeting in a low, melancholy voice. Christy suspected

something at once. However, she asked no questions, and confined herself to general topics of conversation until the corner of Gardiner's Street was reached, and they were in sight of home. Then she invented a message and got rid of Minna, who was a little pitcher with more than commonly long ears, and set herself to extract the cause of Miss Dunne's bad spirits.

'What is the matter, Miss Dunne? I hope there is nothing wrong?'

Christy stopped suddenly and placed herself in front of Philomena.

'I—I thought you knew, Miss Carew,' replied Philomena, half evasively, for she had a mind to keep the secret to herself if she could. She shut up her lips tightly, and looked important.

Miss Carew saw this, and smiled to herself at the idea of Philomena's resisting her will.

'How is Esther?' she asked, in the

authoritative tone of one who has an indubitable right to an answer.

The manner with which this was said was sufficient alone to crush Philomena's transient effort at self-assertion. Her eyes filled up, and her lips quivered.

'Its dreadful ! Oh, wretched ! — wretched !'

'Dear, dear !' responded Christy, with an air at once sympathetic and *ou fait*. 'And what does the Canon say to it ?'

She felt sure that august personage was included in the mystery.

'Deed, you might know what he'd say,' returned Miss Dunne, unsuspectingly. 'Mixed mar'ges ! there is no one's more particular than what he is.'

Christie was silent. She knew everything now, and she paused for a moment, as if shocked. Her curiosity, the dominant failing up to this, was satisfied, and a

sudden rush of compassion and sympathy now took its place.

‘And Esther,’ she said, ‘how about her?’

Two great tears rolled down Philomena’s cheeks.

‘She’s—I don’t know—there. I didn’t see her since yesterday. She is in her room, and—and—oh! it’s pitiful, Miss Carew!’

Miss Carew looked at her in a half-wild kind of way.

‘I’ll come over and see her, to-morrow,’ she cried; then suddenly seized her hand, shook it impetuously, and with a hasty word of ‘good-bye,’ turned and ran off home.

She went straight to Lanty’s study to tell him the news; but it was empty, he was gone to College. She shut the door and sat down in his chair to think it over by herself. Things had no doubt come to a crisis at the Mansion House. How, she would have given worlds to know.

Had Jocelyn gone to O’Neil and form-

ally made a proposal to him for the hand of his daughter ? Hugh O'Neil's conduct on that occasion must have been a study. He would glory in it, and act the hero. She pictured him in her mind's eye listening to Jocelyn's speech with a fury gathering in his eye at every word. What tempers must have been unchained in Hugh O'Neil ?

All the pride and bigotry and rebelliousness would find a vent now and speak for themselves in the name of religion, and in the name of all that religion stands for with people like him. He considered his family infinitely older and incomparably more noble than the Jocelyns'. Lord de Blaquien was only a union lord ; and, moreover, was of a very recent English origin. Hugh O'Neil would think nothing of telling Jocelyn that, in point of family, he considered him inferior to himself.

He would do all that and revel in it, and

one thought of Esther would never interfere or stay his hand for one second. Among them all she would be crushed. Canon Caffrey was the family friend and adviser—ruler rather, for Mrs. O'Neil scarcely dismissed a servant without consulting him, and his sentiments as regarded Protestants, and the danger of frequenting their society, was well known. He might be counted one of the most formidable factors in the opposition.

It was an unlucky thing in every way that Esther should have fallen in with Jocelyn. He was cultivated and refined; he had all those outward graces of manner and appearance that go so far to captivate a girl's fancy; a man of a totally different stamp, in short, to the men of Esther's own circle. She never would be able to marry one of them—never; it would be impossible. She would have to enter a convent, if she lived over this disappointment.

Jocelyn must certainly be deeply in love with her too, and most assuredly with reason, for she was the sweetest and best creature that ever breathed. Suppose they took the law into their own hands and ran off ; the marriage laws of the Church were different in England, and they could be married in London. Esther would never have the courage to do it.

How different people were, and circumstances ! Here was her step-mother doing all she could to urge on her match with Mr. Dawson. Pity the parts could not be changed, and that Esther was not a superfluous step-daughter ; in that case Jocelyn would be a welcome suitor.

‘ You’re wanting in the drawing-room, Miss Carew,’ said a servant, interrupting her reverie.

Christy obeyed the summons, and, on entering, found Mrs. Rochford and Mrs. Almond sitting with Mrs. Carew. The



blinds were drawn down, for the sun was shining full on the front windows of the house, and a mellow half-light flooded the room. A good fire, which was pleasant enough to see after her sojourn in Lanty's sanctum, was burning in the grate: beside it sat Mrs. Rochford, holding her sable muff between her face and the hot blaze. Mrs. Almond was fidgeting with some things on a little table, and Mrs. Carew, dressed in black in honour of the day, with a tiny shawl on her shoulders of some filmy grey wool, was sitting in her own chair, wearing a self-righteous expression on her countenance.

‘So you have got a dirty face too!’ was Mrs. Rochford’s salutation to Christy. ‘Bless us, child!’ she went on, when she had kissed her, ‘what is to become of a sinner like me, if one has to go through such penitential exercises? I shall expect every day to hear of you being caught up by

some of those priests into one of their odious monasteries !'

Though this was spoken in jest, it was half serious too, for Mrs. Rochford, sensible and free from prejudice though she undoubtedly was, had nevertheless her weak point, and that was Rome. She was capable of believing anything in the shape of a bogey story, if only a priest was one of the *dramatis personæ*. She subscribed largely to bird's-nests, ragged schools, and such like institutions, and firmly believed every Papist to be a rank idolater : which nevertheless did not hinder her from conceiving herself in honour bound, when Minna was on a visit to her at Rochfordstown, to abstain from saying a syllable to her on matters religious ; nay, more than that, a Papistical housemaid was told off every night and morning to hear the child say her prayers, and a special Friday dinner was rigorously provided on that day of the week.

‘Monastery!’ echoed Miss Carew, with a laugh. ‘Well, that is an idea! You mean a nunnery, Mrs. Rochford; but of the two, I think I should prefer the monastery. What extraordinary notions you have!’

‘Ah, my dear, notions indeed! It’s all very well your talking; but I know. Look at that O’Donel case! There’s an example for you! Lanty tells me the cardinal has that unfortunate priest imprisoned in the area of his house in Eccles Street, with a chain around his middle, and fed on crumbs like a sparrow. It’s dreadful! scandalous!’

Christina laughed immoderately. At last she was able to speak.

‘You never believed Lanty, Mrs. Rochford? I do declare it’s too bad altogether!’ but then she relapsed again into laughter.

‘My opinion is,’ put in Mrs. Carew, frigidly, ‘that it is not worth while setting stories like these right. Harriet, as long

as you like to hear them, so long will you have them—that's all I can say.'

'A pity she should not,' thought Christy to herself.

She shared many of Lanty's tastes, and amongst them was a perfect appetite for mystification.

'Well, Christy,' said Mrs. Almond, changing her seat, and looking at her as she spoke, with what Christy chose to think an impertinent air, 'when did you last see your admirer?'

Her object in asking this was simply to gauge Miss Carew's feelings on the subject, and was prompted almost exclusively by curiosity. Christy knew her well, and rebelled at once.

'I don't know whom you mean,' she replied calmly.

'You have so many; of course not! Caroline, is she going to listen to reason or not?' demanded Mrs. Almond of her sister.

‘Whether I am or not,’ returned Christy, ‘is my business, and no one else’s, Mrs. Almond.’

‘Quite right, Christy,’ put in Mrs. Rochford; ‘don’t tell her anything, if you don’t want Wentworth to hear it and spread it in the clubs. You know you are not safe, Susan. Christy, have you heard your friend Miss O’Neil’s good luck? that is a fortunate young woman. Nevil Jocelyn, of Mourne Abbey! The very idea of it! He may go to the Colonies with her, that is certain, for not one of his family would look at her—never. R.C., and in trade, he must be mad, and the girl too.’

Mrs. Carew’s face flushed, and she bit her lips and twisted her bracelet irritably.

‘I should think Mr. Jocelyn had more sense. Depend on it it is idle talk, Harriet. I never observed anything of the sort.’

‘I observed it, then, the night of the drawing-room,’ put in Mrs. Almond, hastily;

‘so far back as that. I’m told he paid her marked attentions also at the Viceregal Lodge, and that his horse is to be seen in Dawson Street any hour of the day and night.’

‘Likely ; very likely story, Mrs. Almond,’ burst in Christy, angrily. ‘I am perfectly certain there is not one word of truth in that ; and as for what you say, Mrs. Rochford, I do think, and if you knew her you would say the same, Esther is good enough—and too good—for him or any one like him.’

‘Tush, my child ! what has goodness to do with it ? goodness is gone out of fashion. Has she twenty thousand pounds ? *that* might turn the scale — excepting, indeed, the religion ; and knowing the Mourne Abbey people as I do, I don’t believe any sum would condone that. The very name of Roman Catholic sets old Mrs. Jocelyn furious.’

‘Well,’ retorted Mrs. Carew, acidly, ‘she only shows her ignorance. The very best people in English society—people who never heard of *her* existence—are Catholics. Petty Irish gentility, with its narrowness and bigotry, is simply laughable. So purely Irish as all that sort of thing is.’

‘As for the *pettiness* of Irish gentlefolks, Caroline, that depends on what you compare them with. The Jocelyns are *only* worth four or five thousand a year, but they are quite the first family in the county; and though he is the second son, it would be simply suicidal for Nevil to throw himself away on this O’Neil girl. As for her religion, I dare say it is all very wrong that things should be so; but you can’t help that; and it is your clergy who have made the division and the bitterness.’

‘I don’t know how you can say that now,’ said Mrs. Almond, interposing just in time, for Mrs. Carew was plainly ready

with a sharp rejoinder. 'Don't you remember old Father Saurin of Ratrath, who used to dine with us in poor papa's time? he used to be so fond of us all, poor old man!'

'Ah! that, my dear,' said Mrs. Rochford, 'was long ago; and things were very different then. Father Saurin was one of the old school of priests, trained on the Continent, and utterly different from these. You needn't tell me, Caroline; have I not seen your Canon Caffrey for myself?'

'Indeed!' said Miss Carew; 'I thought you got on rather well with him that day you dined with him here. For myself, I don't like him one bit,' Christy said earnestly.

'Umph! pleasant enough sort of man to talk to. I must move away from this fire, my face is scorching. Priests are capital gossips always. You always get the last news from them about everybody,

and it's always told in a good-natured sort of way. You see at once they have no malice, nor a grain of self-interest in relating it. It is pure history with them, and they are usually quite impartial, too, Yes, I'll allow that.'

'That is *something* from *you*, Harriet,' observed her sister, Mrs. Carew; 'for indeed you are too bad. The idea of listening to that monkey Lanty! Irish Protestants are infinitely more narrow and prejudiced than English. Mr. Dawson, now, has not the slightest prejudice.

'No, nor religion either,' said Christy; 'and I told him so. He was telling me he considered all religions from a purely abstract and unbiassed point of view. Stupid idiot!'

'Did you tell him that too?' asked Susan, glancing to the others.

'Christy, my dear girl, that sort of thing won't do,' said Mrs. Rochford. 'If

you want to get settled in life, I must say you will have to adopt a different manner altogether ; you must be humble and diffident. Have no opinion of your own at all. That's the way a sensible girl shows she has an opinion of herself. Defer to him in all things ; be a regular fool. These clever men like fools best, believe me.'

'I will play the fool for no man living, Mrs. Rochford.'

'Oh, don't, don't, my dear ! Don't take advice either, which is *perhaps* another way of *not* playing the fool. Look at me ! Before I married Herbert Rochford, did I ever have an opinion that was not his first ? Catch me, indeed ! And now *I* manage the estate ; and has he any opinion of his own or anything at all, I should like to know ?'

'Well, all the same,' Christy would not give in, and went on in a dogged tone, 'I want to know how *you* can think Mr. Dawson clever ?'

‘What *I* think, or *you* think, has nothing to do with it. It’s what the men think themselves. They all do it. Take my word, and the less really clever they are in reality, the more they love to imagine themselves geniuses. Listen as if every word was gold, and never want to open your own mouth at all.’

‘If every word he said *was* gold, I would keep very silent you may be sure.’

‘Yes, I’ll bet she would,’ said Lanty, who entered the room just in time to hear this. He greeted the two ladies quickly, and seated himself beside his sister. ‘Who are you plotting against now, Mrs. Rochford? Ah! dear knows, we unfortunate men have a nice time, nowadays. I think I’ll choose a wife who has a few ideas before I marry her. Maybe then there will be a chance of my being allowed to have some afterwards.’

‘Go along with your impudence, sir.’

‘Ah, there it is! Now, Aunt Rochford, just see how she follows your excellent precepts and example. She ought to practise on me to be ready when a *parti* comes along. “Listen as if every word was gold, miss, and never want to open your own mouth at all.” Do you hear?’

‘How dare you mimic me to my face like that, sir! No,’ went on Mrs. Rochford, resuming her didactic tone, ‘young men may be contradicted—it’s good for them; for I don’t at all approve of their being set up with conceit. But once a man comes to a certain age, contradict him or assert yourself, and you’re done with him.’

‘If I could only feel sure of that,’ mused Christy to herself, ‘would I not give Mr. D. his quietus, and be done with him!’

‘That’s stooping to conquer, with a vengeance, Mrs. Rochford,’ observed Lanty, with scorn.

‘Yes, my dear. If your sister will only stoop she’ll conquer, and then she can take her vengeance at her leisure.’

‘Well ! God forgive you there is all I can say, and wait till *I* give one of you a chance.’

Lanty walked off, and Christy speedily made an excuse to get away too.

‘How old is Christy now ?’ asked Mrs. Rochford in a meditative tone, as soon as the door had closed upon her retreating figure.

‘She is eighteen—just eighteen,’ returned Mrs. Carew, in the tone of one announcing a grievance.

‘She won’t grow any more. I grew till I was twenty—she is set ; oh yes, quite set. But she has a pretty figure, very. I admire her altogether, and that pretty clear brunette colour——’

‘A-a-ah !’ sighed the step-mother. ‘I wish she was safely off my hands—I do

indeed. She is a charge, I can assure you ; so giddy and so full of levity. She is a sad responsibility to me altogether ; as headstrong as—as—as——’

‘ Oh there, come now !’ said Mrs. Rochford ; ‘ the child is well enough. I don’t ever remember you such an angel yourself. What do you want her to be at her age ?’

‘ Why don’t you find her a good husband to take care of her ?’ hastily asked Mrs. Almond, who was brimming full of curiosity as to Christy’s suitor and the progress he was making, and who, for many reasons, was not allowed the participation in these family affairs that was so fully accorded to her eldest sister.

Mrs. Rochford held a sort of authority over Mrs. Carew, who in her turn gave herself airs of superiority to Susan Almond. This latter thought she had her opportunity now, and fixed an expectant eye on Mrs. Carew’s Lenten physiognomy. She,

however, was not to be caught so, and replied snubbingly :

‘ Good husbands are not so plentiful, Susan ; and Christina is in no hurry. Besides,’ she added pointedly, ‘ hurry in that business is seldom advantageous.’

‘ Humph !’ replied Susan, whom snub, any more than innuendo, could not put down. ‘ People who overstay their market have to put up with what they can get. Fifteen thousand’ (she italicised her words) ‘ a year, you know, is not to be had every day.’

She paused, watching the effect of her words. Mrs. Carew was perfectly silent. Her face, however, wore an expression that was eloquent enough ; it signified at once easy contempt of the speaker’s tactics, and acquiescence—uncompromising assent—to the main statements of the speech.

Mrs. Rochford looked on without saying

a word. She fully approved of Susan's being kept outside the pale of confidence, for it was notorious in the family that anything that was told her speedily found its way abroad, through the channel of Wentworth, with whom a secret was as safe as water in a sieve.

Caroline knew Susan too well to suppose for an instant that she had any real care or interest in Christy or her welfare. Susan was certainly capable of feeling glad the girl should be disposed of so far as her, Mrs. Carew's, interests were involved ; but beyond that she did not believe she would interfere to prevent her eloping with the baker, if it were only well understood they were going far enough off. And Mrs. Carew, though she herself would have been the last in the world to suspect it, had at bottom a real affection for her bright, good-humoured step-daughter.

She was doing her best to urge on the



match with Mr. Dawson, for she honestly believed that no girl could have a better chance of establishing herself. Christy must marry—that was inevitable, sooner or later. When she herself was eighteen, she would have jumped at such a chance ; and what did the man's looks matter ? Taking him feature by feature singly, he was absolutely handsome. He had a good nose, his eyes were by no means bad, and his mouth, it could not be denied, was amiable of expression and neither too large nor too small. Nevertheless, considered altogether, she was forced to allow that the general effect was inharmonious. These features, so good in themselves separately, seemed incongruous when considered relatively to each other as a whole. As to his being rather bald, what about that ? Every man, she declared with airy comprehensiveness, was bald nowadays. To her mind it conveyed an expression of intellectuality, and it was not

to be denied that he was an intellectual, deeply-read man ; although not at all in her line of literature. There was nothing of romance or sentiment about him ; and for herself, she idolised poetry. Perhaps he was all the better for being so positive-headed, so matter of fact and sensible. A typical Englishman, in short—solid and thorough and sterling—oh, so sterling ! Mrs. Carew repeated the word as if she were pleased with the sound of it. Infinitely beyond Irishmen as husbands. No girl with any grain of common-sense could think for an instant of preferring an Irish to an English husband !

The girl to whom these lucubrations were habitually addressed, whether it was that she was destitute of this same grain of common-sense or not, usually showed her appreciation of them by laughing in the most immoderate manner. Never by any chance or accident could a word be ex-

tracted from Miss Carew that would give any definite clue to the sentiments with which she regarded the advances of this most eligible and desirable suitor. She invariably laughed, as has been said, when any one ventured to recommend the gentleman's attractions, physical or intellectual ; but it was also remarkable, and far more significant, that she never equally by any chance or accident abused him in that violent way which with young ladies may be invariably taken as an index of feelings the very contrary to those they express.

‘ Very true—very true, indeed,’ said Mrs. Rochford, in reply to Mrs. Almond’s observation, which Mrs. Carew chose not to notice. ‘ *Fifteen* thousands a year’—she too italicised her figures, but with a different meaning—‘are not as plentiful as blackberries. And you’ll forgive my saying it, my dear, but he is a pill that would need a deal of gilding.’

Mrs. Carew blinked her eyes a little as she saw her 'margin' gradually dissolve. However, she was, as we know, prepared beforehand for that, and made answer in a stubborn tone that he had a deal of gilding.

'He is over forty, is he not?' asked Mrs. Almond, in an impertinent way, jerking out her question like a pellet from a pop-gun.

Mrs. Carew turned round angrily, and looked at her as if wondering at her audacity; but the incorrigible Susan bent her eyes on her glove-button, with which she was struggling, and from beneath the shadow of her brows flashed a signal for assistance to her eldest sister.

The truth was, this pair, unknown to each other, had come for one and the same purpose, namely, to ascertain everything about the approaching Dawson - Carew alliance. Mrs. Rochford had been told a great deal, much more, indeed, than she

believed. Not indeed that Mrs. Carew told untruths. Far from that. She was extremely candid, and prided herself on being so ; but she was one of those people who proclaim publicly their opinions on all matters, and who change, equally publicly, their opinions every day. She would survey a question, so to say, from every quarter of the compass. While she had been blowing from south-west by south to Harriet Rochford, she had at the same time stormed from north-east by north to Susan Almond. She had said one day that the suitor was forty, which was probably true ; but Susan Almond was over anxious for the match, so she had blown from a cold point upon her, while to Mrs. Rochford, who did not like it, and who held that Christy should be left to herself in the matter, she had represented him to be only thirty-four or five, and to be the *ne plus ultra* of intellect and good nature and

riches—had in fact fanned her with the softest zephyrs. Mrs. Carew said sulkily :

‘He is five-and-thirty, no more ; a sensible age.’

‘Not always,’ said Mrs. Rochford, drily ; ‘and exactly double Christy’s. It’s a serious thing ; I declare, Caroline, I often feel thankful I have not the responsibility you have. Life in England, and particularly in the more mercantile set to which of course this man belongs, will be a very different thing indeed to what she has been accustomed to. Well, of course, I have nothing to do with it ; it is difficult to get girls settled nowadays, and he is rich. We don’t know of course exactly how rich’ (this was exasperating, after Mrs. Carew had told her fifteen thousand a year) ; ‘of course there *is* money. Let us hope——’

Mrs. Carew veered round due north and froze at once.

‘There is little use, so far as things have gone yet, in discussing the matter. He is rich, he is double her age; and you will allow that, with the anxieties I have to contend with, the young children growing up, and Lanty’s expensive education, and Edward so delicate, and, moreover his time of life——’

Here she contorted her face as if she were about to cry, and, taking out her handkerchief, rubbed her nose a bright red.

‘I should not be blamed if I, feeling as I do the desirableness of it, did, what *I do not do*, try to force this marriage on——’

‘There, there now, Caroline, no one said so. Run along and put on your things like a good girl; those horses of mine have stood long enough in this east wind.’

Mrs. Carew went away to dress for a drive, and her eldest sister got up and

went to the window to hide a laugh, while Mrs. Almond, grumbling, put her feet into the fender to warm them before going out.

From her window above Christy presently watched the landau drive off; Susan with her back to the horses, but sheltered by the servants and the high front from the wind that, in the shaded places, crept with an insidious chill as of cold steel, and in the sun swept fine dust-clouds high overhead and ruffled their hair and feathers with a capricious, wanton license it had surely brought with it from foreign parts. Christy frowned at her.

‘One lesson was not enough for her impertinence,’ thought Miss Carew. ‘What business had she meddling and asking questions, or calling Mr. Dawson an adorer? Stuff!’

Not that Miss Carew had the slightest objection to having an admirer; indeed, the more of them there were the better



fun, she considered. Westerton, Longleat, D'Arcy, Conroy, and others, she had smiles for all of them ; and Dawson, if he chose to rank himself among this crowd of aspirants who indeed ambitioned no more, honest fellows, than to sit in the light of the same smiles, would have been made welcome as they were. But Mr. Dawson had higher aims. He wanted to marry her, and she knew it.

Miss Christina knew that one of these days she would have to sit in the drawing-room and listen to Mr. Dawson declaring his sentiments for her. She could almost see him with one lavender kid glove on his left hand, his right hand bare, and the glove belonging to it lying in his hat, which, doubtless in order that his declamation might be unimpeded, he would have deposited in a place of safety at a little distance.

She had pictured the scene to herself

more than once, and it was with no very pleasant feelings that she felt it weekly drawing nearer, notwithstanding all her efforts to discourage and check the gentleman's advances.

She rather enjoyed the sensation of the consequence with which she was invested. The Cust girls and others envied her openly, and ran down Mr. Dawson and enlarged on all his drawbacks in a way that was quite complimentary.

He sent her flowers even from Birmingham. As yet, nothing more serious in the way of presents had been conferred upon her, but she suspected that before long something in that line would occur ; for Mr. Dawson had on the occasion of his last visit asked her in a serious tone, and *à propos* of nothing at all, which was her favourite poet. Miss Carew, who cared not for any poet, and who had read Byron simply and solely because that author is



disapproved by the ecclesiastical lord chamberlain whose office it is to dispense literary licence to the faithful, had replied at random, 'Tennyson,' and thought no more about it.

At present, indeed, she was thinking very little of the matter; she was occupied with thoughts of her friend, and she wished impatiently for the morrow when she hoped to see her. She tried to read, but she could not fix her attention on the words before her, and instead of them she seemed to be reading over and over again Mrs. Rochford's talk; and at last she threw the book on a shelf and ran down to the drawing-room to practise.

Two hours afterwards, when she had tired her fingers and had worn out her stock of perseverance, she seated herself by the fire wondering at Mrs. Carew's delay. Whether she fell asleep or not is not known, but at about five o'clock the door opened noisily,

and Mrs. Carew entered, escorted by Minna and Elsie.

‘Christy ! Christy !’ shouted Minna, ‘a parcel for you. Matthew is carrying it up ; it’s so heavy—a box !’

‘Oh, Christy,’ said Mrs. Carew, in a wonderfully bright, pleasant voice, ‘have you been napping ? Your hair is so tossed ! Come, my dear, here is something charming. Shut the door, Matthew. The fairy prince, my dear. Cut the string, can’t you ?’

‘No, I shan’t cut the string !’ replied Miss Carew, whose face, whether from the effects of the fire or her sleep, had taken a sudden bright glow. There was very little show of sleep in her hazel eyes : they had a spark in each of them that boded mischief.

She untied the cord deliberately, and rolled it up on her finger and thumb before proceeding to unfold the paper covers.

The children were dancing with impatience, and their mamma looked on with a smile that was fully as expressive.

At last the contents of the parcel appeared: a green leather-covered book-box, containing a lovely edition of the Laureate's works, bound in Russian leather, and smelling of the same most odorously.

Mrs. Carew was lost in admiration.

'What taste!' she cried; 'what judgment! This is truly an *édition de luxe*! Ah, my dear, how often I have longed for such a *cadeau*! It is Tennyson as he ought to be. Ah—"Locksley Hall!"'

She held one volume open, with her nose buried among the pages, as if the poetry had gained by the perfumed binding.

'I think yours a very nice one,' returned Christy. 'However, I will allow this is really beautiful—as I wish it to remain so, Minna, keep your fingers off!'

‘Can’t you allow the child to look?’ snapped Mrs. Carew, crossly, laying down the volume she held on the table.

‘Oh yes,’ answered Miss Carew, in a measured tone. ‘Look as much as you like; but don’t touch.’

Thereupon she put the little green books all back in their case, closed it, papered and corded it exactly as it was before, and then, embracing it in both arms, carried it up to her own room, and locked it away safely in her wardrobe.



CHAPTER VII.

‘Es wäre zwei Königs Kinder
Die hatten einander so lieb,
Die könnten beisammen nie kommen,
Das Wasser war viel zu tief.’

HEINE.

THE next morning was wet. Christy surveyed the broad expanse of grey driving mist overhead with a sort of defiance. Rain should not keep her from visiting Esther. A cab could easily be got. She had promised to go, and she chose to keep her word always. Nothing should prevent her. Mrs. Carew, of course, would try to put

obstacles in the way—it was only to be expected.

She came down to breakfast in this mood ; but she found a letter on her plate which rather changed it. A glance at the sharp-pointed feeble flourishes was enough, though she had never seen them before, to show her that her correspondent was the faithful Philomena.

Miss Dunne proclaimed herself by her caligraphy as plain as if she had signed her name outside on the envelope. Scratchy and unfinished and feeble, and at the same time highly characteristic, the writing seemed to photograph herself. The envelope was stamped with the official residence and monogram, as was also the paper ; the note was as formal and precise as if it had been copied out of a ‘ Polite Letter-Writer.’ It began : ‘ Dear Miss Carew’—Philomena would not have dared to say ‘ my dear ’ to that young lady—‘ I regret to have to

enform you that Miss O'Neil is so unwell that she is compelled with great regret to postpone the plesure of your visit until to-morow, Friday, March 7th: on which date she trusts it will be your convenience to call upon her. We both hope the sevurity of this wheather has not injuriously affected either yourself or any of the famaly. Believe me, dear Miss Carew, to remain yours very sincerely—*PHILOMENA*
MARY DUNNE, ✠ E. de M.'

‘What are you laughing at?’ asked the crown solicitor of his eldest daughter, holding out his cup. ‘Will you give me a small lump of sugar? and don’t forget Caroline’s second cup of tea.’

‘Nothing—nothing at all. Lanty,’ she said, ‘cast your eye over that.’ Miss Carew tossed the letter over to her brother, attended to her father’s request, and sent the maid upstairs for Mrs. Carew’s cup.

Her step-mother was in bed ; the natural result of her pious extravagances of the preceding day. ‘ Well ? ’ she said, after she had watched Lanty read the composition through word by word, his expressive countenance showing that he thoroughly appreciated it.

‘ Fair—eh—fair ; but what’s the meaning of E. de M. after her name ? and note that she has two names. I didn’t know that before.’

‘ E. de M. ? don’t you know ? It means *Enfant de Marie*. She belongs to that association ; so do I,’ added Miss Carew, after a moment’s recollection.

‘ Well, I hope you don’t put it after your name when you sign it. What a funny idea ! And the little cross, too. I like it. I like the whole thing. Hey though ! what’s this ?’

Lanty in his inspection had discovered some pencilled words on the last sheet,

which had escaped his sister's observation.

‘Give me that. What is it?’ she said.

He handed over the letter. A few blurred words only, scribbled all awry in pencil: ‘*Do come to me, Christy, I want so badly to see you.*’ She jumped up when she had read them and committed the whole thing — Philomena’s ill-spelt formalities and all—to the flames. She had no longer any inclination to laugh, and ate no more breakfast.

The next day in the afternoon, by three o’clock, she presented herself at the door of the Mansion House; not without some trepidation, for she feared to meet the worthy O’Neil. She was expected, however, for the footman handed her over at once to a maidservant, who, having conducted her to the boudoir, went away to inform her mistress of her arrival.

After ten minutes’ waiting, Philomena

appeared and begged Miss Carew to forgive the delay. The canon was at lunch in the dining-room, but was going away directly.

‘Is Esther at lunch too?’ inquired Miss Carew.

‘Yes,’ replied Philomena; ‘her headache is quite gone.’

Christy sat down a little puzzled. She had fully expected to find her friend in bed crying herself to death, with Philomena in attendance, crying sympathetically, and proffering eau de Cologne. Now here she was at lunch with—of all the people on this earth—the canon. Miss Carew felt disappointed—a little disgusted perhaps, too. However, she had barely time to arrange her thoughts and come to any definite conclusion, for the door of the boudoir opened suddenly and Esther walked in. She seemed at first to see no one in the room; her eyes seemed to Christy,

who was looking at her curiously, larger and brighter than before, and on each cheek there was a bright feverish red spot.

‘Is he gone?’ cried Philomena. She wanted to say something to the canon before he left. ‘Is lunch over, Esther?’

Esther turned her eyes on her with a sort of questioning, frightened look, and answered in an absent, half irritable voice :

‘No, I don’t know.’

Just then a wave of voices came up the stairs ; predominant among them the bass of the canon. Philomena sped off so fast that she neglected to shut the door behind her. Christy shut it impatiently and took her friend’s hand. She wondered what the girl’s manner meant. Esther gave her hand mechanically—it was burning hot—and looked at Christy, her head swaying meantime from side to side, as does a person who is terribly fatigued. She murmured some words of greeting, then

she pressed both hands to her brow and let herself fall almost into a chair. Christy sat down beside her, watching her narrowly. She could see now that her eyes were bloodshot, and there were bluish circles round them.

‘Esther ! tell me—what has happened ? You are not well, and what possessed you to go down to lunch ? Do tell me, dear ; I am so sorry !’

The tears were running down her cheeks as she spoke. Esther looked at her and smiled faintly :

‘It is not worth crying about, Chris,’ she said, in a low voice. ‘I dare say, too, you have heard what has happened.’

‘I know about Jocelyn—yes—but——’

‘I am never to see him again, or he me,’ and Esther let her hands fall on her knees, and bent her head over them so that her face was not to be seen.

‘Who said it ?’ burst out Christy, in

mutinous tones. 'They have no right—not one bit. It is all that canon.' She stopped suddenly on seeing the drooped head make a sign of negation. 'Well, who then ?'

'You know very well what my father and mother think. *He* has said to Nevil he would rather, and he will, see me dead, before he——' Then she stopped and began to sob with dry hard convulsive sobs that shook her from head to foot. 'Oh, Christy—I—I want to see him again. Only once!—only once!'

'I would,' returned Christy ; 'I would—and more than once, too. . You ought to have more spirit. Catch me letting any one interfere in my affairs like that.'

She was kneeling beside her friend's chair with one arm round her.

'What can I do ?'

'Oh, fly out, somehow. If it came to that, I—I'd run off.'

Miss Carew spoke even more rebelliously than before. She was standing up now on the hearthrug with her back to the fire, and so far as looks and speech go, was the incarnation of revolt and sedition; her tawny eyes gleamed, her teeth were set, even her hair, ruffled all round her face, seemed to rebel against its usual smooth restraint, and a number of little rough curls stood on end under the velvet brim of her hat. She looked the exact antithesis of poor Esther, lying so helpless and spiritless in her chair, bent and quivering like a wind-beat reed.

Esther made no answer to her friend's daring proposition, only looked at her despairingly, as if she only half-gathered her meaning, and then seemed to sink into a sort of torpor.

Christy said to herself, as she watched her, there was little use preaching revolt to her. She would submit to everything, she



had not a particle of spirit of her own. She pitied her with all her heart, and vainly tried to find words of consolation and encouragement. What was there in the world that she could do to comfort her? She seemed to have but one wish in the world—to see Jocelyn again; and how could she be of service to that end?

‘Esther,’ she said at last, ‘are you asleep, dear? You look sleepy.’

‘I never went to bed last night at all. I sat upon the side of it; I thought I was going mad.’

‘Never went to bed!’ repeated Christy.
‘Oh, Esther!’

‘Just now I thought you were old Father Considine. Do you remember we went to see him last year? It seems such an age since.’ She put her hand over her eyes again, and ceased speaking.

Christy looked at her, but said nothing, and in a few minutes she could see the

poor girl had fallen into a sleep, troubled and broken, but still a sleep. She got a cushion from the sofa near at hand, and slipped it under her shoulders.

Philomena came in presently, as solemn as ever, and walking on her toes.

‘She is asleep,’ she said, ‘and I am glad of it. Miss Carew, all last night she sat up—yes, on the bedside, all night—and nothing I could do—I stopped all night with her—would make her undress or even lie down. She just stayed there rocking herself to and fro. Then to-day she must come down and go about as usual. At lunch she eat nothing; even the canon observed it, and just now he was telling her ladyship that she ought to have a change—go away till she forgot it, you know.’

‘Tell me about Tuesday,’ said Miss Carew, briefly.

‘Tuesday? Yes, that was the day Mr.

Jocelyn saw her papa in his lordship's private room. I saw him come down the steps and mount his horse—such a white face, and his eyes as wild— Then at dinner not a word said, and she looked so frightened, expecting, you know. Then, after dinner, they went into the private room.'

'They! Who?' demanded Miss Carew.

'Him and her, and Mrs. O'Neil, her ladyship, and Father Fogarty.'

'Oh, the chaplain!'

'Yes. And then I suppose she'—looking at Esther—'was told what the family determined about the marriage.'

Christina's wits had been busy with more than one matter while eliciting this information from Miss Dunne. The affair by this was evidently no secret. The canon and the chaplain knew all about it, and her acute ear detected in the manner of Miss Dunne's delivery evidences that she was repeating her talk by no means for the

first time. Her way of telling it was not more her own than her letter of the day before had been. 'What the family had determined about the mar'ge.' That was the chaplain's, who was fond of long words. No doubt Philomena had heard the canon also hold out on the same subject, and it was highly probable that later on, when the story had become staler and had crystallised into pure literature, his contribution would also have its place. It was also noteworthy that she, Miss Carew, had never once been requested to keep her knowledge of these affairs secret. The idea that privacy and secrecy was desirable evidently had not occurred to the family. Hugh O'Neil would certainly not make it a subject of general conversation, but he would equally certainly have no objection to his strong-handed course of action being known, if only as an example.

Christina, in her own mind, gave him

credit for being pleased with this opportunity of exhibiting his devotedness to the Church. He would martyr himself, in his daughter's person, as grimly and steadfastly as one of those early saints, whose lives, as admirable biographers have penned them, are still proposed as edifying reading to those of the faithful as may be of literary inclination, and whose very names Miss Carew detested with all her heart. As for Mrs. O'Neil, she would do what she was told, first by her director, the canon, and secondly by her husband.

‘What does her mamma say?’ asked Christy, of Philomena, who was now sitting on an extreme edge of a chair, with her hands, which were cased in grey mittens, folded demurely in her lap, and her head inclined a little forwards and sideways.

She was bird-witted, and at times Lanty Carew declared, looked a bird. Christy

thought she saw the likeness now, and, in spite of herself, almost laughed.

‘I beg your pardon, Miss Carew?’

Philomena, too, was sleepy from her vigils of the night before, and had not caught the question. When it had been reiterated, she said dolefully : ‘She’s greatly put out. You know, it’s a serious thing, and may hinder Esther getting settled—married. My mamma says the same thing.’

Here a servant brought in cards on a salver, and muttering, ‘In the drawing-room, miss,’ went away. Christy fancied, from the look he gave in the direction of Esther’s chair, that he, too, was thoroughly posted in current events.

‘Mrs. Callan, Miss Callan, and Miss Grace Callan,’ began Miss Dunne, reading out the names one after the other. ‘Oh! I wonder wouldn’t she like to see Bedelia and Grace? It might do her good, eh, Miss Carew?’

‘No, no!’ exclaimed Christy, with horror at the idea. ‘She has a headache, and just wants to be let sleep. I am going, and, Miss Dunne, if I were you I should just tell them Esther is not well.’

‘Good-bye, then, Miss Carew,’ and assuming a face *de circonstance* of mingled grief and importance, Philomena set sail for the drawing-room.

‘Now, will she tell them, or will she not?’ Christy asked herself. ‘Surely Mrs. O’Neil won’t, and she is in the drawing-room. She was always so proud of poor Esther, and that pair, Bedelia and Graceless, were always trying to rival her. I do wonder what attitude Mrs. O’Neil will take up! They know it already, I have not a doubt. But I must go home.’

She stooped and kissed her friend’s cheek, and then left. Once in the street she turned round, and looked up at the white front of the Mansion House.

From a side window a grey and white shadow seemed to be watching her fixedly. It was her horror, Hugh O'Neil, who was then holding converse with the canon. A glance was enough. Miss Carew set off almost at a run, and never slackened her pace till the river Liffey was between her and him.

Meantime, in the drawing-room, among the yellow silk hangings, the Irish point antimacassars, and under the immediate and unceasing surveillance of the great French clock, that scene was enacting which had so exercised Christy Carew's curiosity.

The lady mayoress, wearing an immense gown of greenish-blue silk, heavily laced and embroidered, her fat red hands cased in mittens, and glistening with rings of no particular value, sat in her own chair, next a blazing fire, and agitating a fire-screen as nearly in the manner of Lady Quorn as she could imitate from memory, was trying

to make conversation with Mrs. Callan—a lady who resembled herself so closely in dress, manner, and conversation, that a separate description would be useless.

Philomena was holding an *ex parte* conversation with the Misses Callan in a far-off corner. Philomena's face wore a doubly mournful expression, but the sleepiness was utterly gone. Miss Graceless' mouth was wide open, and her round eyes were almost tearful in their sympathy; her elder sister Bedelia—a copy of her mother on a smaller scale—looked severe and condemnatory, not to say gratified.

The lady mayoress distinctly shelved the question. Mrs. Callan was a hen with a rival brood, and would be glad to know of her daughter's disqualification. They both belonged to the peasant class, or were but one remove from it, and both shared the peasant feeling, that no intercourse between a young man and a girl is permissible

unless with matrimonial intent. Mrs. Callan belonged to a lower strata even than Mrs. O'Neil, and had been one of the first to observe, at the civic festivities, that Mr. Jocelyn and Miss O'Neil were 'talking—paying—paying her attentions,' she corrected her phraseology, as her daughter bade her. She had hoped to be lady mayoress this year; but Alderman Callan had been unsuccessful, and she had daily been expecting to hear of Miss O'Neil's having profited by her opportunities—and now! Mrs. O'Neil might be as reserved as she liked, but she knew—she knew that 'a Protestant young gentleman' had made her daughter conspicuous by his addresses—had proposed *for* her, and had been sent about his business. Well, she was sorry on account of the girl—a sweet creature always; sorry on account of her old friend Mrs. O'Neil, and that good man Hugh O'Neil; but on account of her own

two daughters, she felt much as the owner of the second favourite feels when the first favourite is suddenly disabled, and consequently scratched.

Mrs. O'Neil talked stiffly of the weather, and tried to look Mrs. Callan in the face unconcernedly ; but her eyelids were red and swollen, and there was now and again a tremor in her voice. She observed stiffly, almost aggressively, in reply to a question put in the low, plaintive tone that would-be sympathy assumes, that Esther was suffering from headache, induced chiefly by the east wind, she thought ; but that in a few days, she hoped, she would be all right again.

She knew perfectly well that Philomena was relating the whole cause of Miss O'Neil's non-appearance to the greedy gaping pair behind. She could have heard, had she been so minded, Miss Grace's eager questions largely interspersed with

sighs and groans of sympathy: one word tumbling head over heels after the other from her shapeless, muscleless mouth.

Philomena, confused by over-rapid interrogation and all the mingled emotions her important situation called up, speedily lost all control of even her bird's share of brains, and answered yes and no at random to the questions and suggestions of her interlocutors. Heaven knows what tale of mystery and horror might not have been evolved between the trio, had not the door of the *salon* suddenly swung open, giving ingress to Hugh O'Neil's lean, stark figure, which the robust rotundity close behind it of the famous canon threw into high relief.

The chief magistrate greeted his wife's guests with a grave and distant manner, and seated himself in a chair nearly opposite Mrs. Callan. He inquired for her husband, whom he had that morning met

in the City Hall, and then relapsed into an oppressive silence.

The canon began a conversation with the three young women, each of whom, Philomena, her woe notwithstanding, included, giggled at every word he said, as if it were the finest joke in the world. After a while he seemed to recollect that this merriment, or seeming merriment rather, for it was most utterly unreal, was out of place. Not that he felt it so in the least, and, frowning suddenly, he quitted his seat and came to place himself near the two elder ladies, assuming at the same time a countenance of the most severe kind.

Mrs. Callan, with whom he was engaged to dine the following Sunday, comforted herself with the thought that she would hear everything then, and began a conversation with him and Mrs. O'Neil, that had neither object nor interest save to pass

a few moments until it would be time to go. The canon contributed an oracular quota to the feeble trickle of talk : pronounced the harsh east wind to be the very thing for the country parts, and at all events seasonable ; but allowed that it was very trying for weak lungs. In all which profound and original remarks Mrs. Callan agreed.

They left at last. The canon went almost immediately after. He had had nearly enough of Hugh O'Neil's fiery zeal, in the interval that had elapsed since lunch-time. Men of the lord mayor's stamp, however inestimably useful, are always uncomfortable disciples, and the prospect of an evening to be spent with a jovial easy-going Queen's counsel, who, as he said to himself, took things easily, seeing that a hundred years hence would pretty well level all differences, was by no means unwelcome to the sociable churchman.

It was now drawing towards six o'clock, and the dusk of the March day was dropping down slowly and surely, as if from the grey walls and eaves of the city roofs. The noise without was less, and the chirp of the sooty sparrows, gathering to their haunts about the waterspouts, could be distinctly heard. The fire in the brilliant grate seemed a deeper and firier red, and began to cast reflections on the shining surfaces here and there round the room. The lady mayoress sat still and stared into it with melancholy absent eyes. She felt at once confused and grieved, injured and indignant; and she had, too, an unceasing consciousness, gnawing like a pain, that Esther was suffering and ill. She watched Philomena rise and glide, like a mauve-coloured cat, from the room, and, knowing whither she was bound, a sad sore sigh of complaining and helplessness rose from her very heart. She thought of those two Callans,

unconcerned and giggling, and brimful of hateful curiosity, and they had never been fit to hold a candle to her girl—so sweet and good and so admired everywhere; and a tear ran down her nose and off the end of it on to her rich silk dress.

What was the use of all that now? Esther had missed her chances; she had paid no heed to the advances of Aloysius Peter Rooney, who was worth forty thousand pounds, and was a connection of the canon's, and all to go and spoil herself with a Protestant officer, belonging to a family renowned for their bigotry and oppression all through the country. She too, like Philomena, echoed the canon sometimes. No wonder that the tears ran down unheeded on her dress.

Opposite to her sat Hugh O'Neil, immovable and grey as ever. His elbows

rested on the cushioned arms of the chair, and his hands were clasped together before him. From under his shaggy brows his small dull eyes looked also into the red mass of coals, the flicker of which showed the massive links of the chain of office where it crossed his shirt-front, and only the occasional rise and fall of this, showed a sign of life about him. This mute interview had lasted some short while, when Mrs. O'Neil, with a fresh access of grief, murmured a loud 'Oh dear!' and wiped her face with her pocket-handkerchief.

'Mary Josephine,' said her husband, in his usual low voice, only harsher than usual, 'it is useless your troubling yourself.'

She only groaned deprecatingly and again wiped her face.

'No, it is useless. She must repent her

folly—her—her misconduct—and make amends.’

‘She’s not to blame, Hugh O’Neil. I’ll not sit here and let that be said.’

‘I say she is, and the mischief is now done; but it must be suffered to go no further. I am responsible, I am answerable, and it shall not.’

She made no answer; his words—‘the mischief is now done’—rang in her head. Mr. Rooney no doubt would never again come forward, nor perhaps any one else; and after all Esther might go into a convent. But she would so much rather she had remained in the world. To her ease-loving nature it was so much more comfortable to picture her daughter well settled, with a carriage and a good house—as good and well furnished in all respects as the one in which she had been brought up—than to think of her as a frigid saint somebody or other only visible at cer-

tain stated times ; living by rule, and almost speaking by rule ; near, yet far off ; and whose interest and affection in her own family consisted in praying for them. She had a sister a nun, dead now long ago. She remembered being allowed to visit her on the second Sunday of the month, and of how little they had to say to each other on those occasions of their meeting. She knew, too, that she had to get up all the year round at five o'clock, and that she had invariably chilblains in winter. They were saintly creatures, and led a beautiful life ; no doubt it was a blessing to be called by God to lead such a life, but it was a blessing she had never coveted for herself, still less for her daughter. Yet things might so be now that she would perhaps come to welcome the idea of the conventual refuge.

Hugh O'Neil had risen from his chair,

and was striding up and down the room with stiff, measured paces. At the other end the long, stooped, black figure was reflected in the great looking-glasses. He stopped suddenly, and, casting a look at his wife as if he thought he had heard her say something, said in a hoarse mutter : ' Never, never, never ! ' then resumed his pacing to and fro. What could have been running in his head ? There was not room for much imagination to work and ferment among all the prejudices that cumbered that not too spacious receptacle, else one might have thought that the worthy chief-magistrate was rehearsing a *rôle* for himself to play later on in some terrible religious and political drama. His wife at the fireside only sighed more deeply still ; then a man came in and lighted candles. Philomena and the chaplain and Nicholas John, the eldest son, made their appearance

all singly. The lady mayoress sent Miss Dunne for her gold smelling-bottle, and, having inhaled some salts, led the way downstairs to a fast-day dinner.

END OF VOL. II.

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